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Interviewees: Irving Abrams (b.1925, Avenel, NJ)
Marjorie "Marjie" Kohler Abrams (b. 1925, Knoxville, TN)

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Begin Tape 1, Side A

DR: Can I ask each of you to tell me where and when you were born?

IA: Yes. I was born in 1925, May 13, in Avenel, New Jersey.

DR: Avenel.

IA: Avenel.

DR: How do you spell that?

IA: A-V-E-N-E-L, I hope. Since I left there when I was two years old, I'm not quite sure, but that's the way I remember it.

DR: Okay, and Mrs. Abrams?

MB: I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1925.

DR: 1925. Okay. What I want is for you to give me a little background of where your families came from. This is really to set the stage of how South Carolina Jewry arrived in the state, so to speak. Mr. Abrams, do you know anything about your father's and your mother's—

IA: Yes. My mother was an immigrant who came from Austria-Hungary, when she was about one year old. Her maiden name was Brettschneider, and they lived in New York City. My father was born in this country, but his parents came from Russia. They were married in 1918, in New York City. My dad was in the shirt business, and soon after they were married, they moved to Troy, New York, which at the time was the shirt manufacturing capital of the world. That's what led us to South Carolina. In 1936 he took a job with Piedmont Shirt Company, as head of the company, and that's when we moved down here. It was one of the first major shirt companies in South Carolina and eventually, I believe, it became the biggest one. It was probably the first manufacturing plant to have any integration.

DR: Really?

IA: Surprised? Yes, when he came here, his pressing department was all white, and he decided that white people just couldn't press shirts—and they really couldn't. He gradually put all black people in his pressing department. The only reason he was able to do it was because they were standing up, because of the law in South Carolina, you couldn't seat a black person next to a white person. That's why they didn't have any on sewing machines. That did succeed and it was very successful. That was part of the history of it. They were in an old four-story building in downtown Greenville, they did very well and then they moved out on Buncombe Road, built a brand new building about four times as big, and became quite successful. Their trade name was Wings, I don't know if you remember that.

MA: I remember.

IA: He developed that. It was a collar made out of airplane cloth that was supposed to last a lifetime, but it really didn't. We had some customers that got a new shirt every year, but not too many. So that was really how we got established in Greenville.

DR: What were your parents' names?

IA: My dad's name was Harry Samuel and my mother's name was Mary Brettschneider.

DR: Could you spell Brettschneider?

IA: B-R-E-T-T-S-C-H-E- I don't know. Beats me.

DR: Schneider?

IA: Schneider, yes.

DR: Brettschneider.

IA: Yeah.

DR: Okay. You said that your father's family came from Russia?

IA: Yes.

DR: Do you know what part?

IA: No. I really don't. And my mother's family was from Austria-Hungary, but I don't know the city.

DR: Do you know if the name Abrams—how the name Abrams came?

IA: I believe it was Abramowitz years back, but I never did have any relatives that used that name.

DR: Did anyone from either side of the family bring anything from the old country?

IA: I'm sure my grandmothers did, but I don't have any recollection of any of it still being in existence.

DR: That's one of the things that we're asking about for the exhibition, to see if people had handed down objects from where they came from.

IA: I don't think so. There was some jewelry that you got, but I think you—didn't you get something from my mother that was her grandmother's?

MA: Yes.

IA: It was my mother's, but I think she got it from her grandmother. I don't remember what it was now.

MA: A lavalier.

IA: But you can tell her about that.

DR: A lavalier?

MA: Uh-huh.

DR: That's a lapel pin?

MA: No. It's a necklace.

DR: A necklace. What is that—

SR: It's a type of pendant, isn't it?

MA: Yes.

SR: That hangs from a chain, kind of long.

MA: Well this one is very short, unless it was made over.

DR: I'm curious, because those microphones are called lavalier mikes.

MA: Are they?

DR: Uh-huh. That's why I thought it must be clip-on. I had always assumed that's what it meant.

IA: Back in the old days, they didn't have clips.

DR: Is there any sort of folklore or family stories about why people came or anything about the voyage over?

IA: Yes. My mother's father came because he was escaping from being conscripted into the army somehow. His name was actually Skolnick, but he changed it to my grandmother's name, Brettschneider, so he could get out of the country. At least that's the story that I always heard.

DR: Do you know when he might have—

IA: Yeah. He came here in 19—let's see, 1996, 1995—1895. I'll get the year right.

DR: 1895. Do you know where he came through?

IA: Well, I'm going to have to backtrack on that. My mother was born in 1896, so he must have come here in—probably—she was a year old. It was 1897 actually, 'cause she was a year old when she came here.

DR: Do you know how they came into the country?

IA: Came in New York, through Ellis Island.

DR: Uh-huh. Have you been to Ellis Island?

IA: No, not since they've redone it.

DR: That is worth a trip. Spectacular museum, and it takes a whole day to go through it. It is huge.

IA: Yeah. I would imagine so.

DR: It is really huge. They have a wall with people's names on it, and if you pay a hundred dollars, I think you get your relative's name.

IA: But I don't know too much of the actual history of when they lived over in Europe.

DR: You don't know what they did or—

IA: No. I really don't.

DR: Do you know when your father's side came?

IA: Let's see, he was born in 1894. They must have come about 1892, I would imagine, because he was born in New York City.

DR: And when was he born?

IA: 1894.

DR: Born in 1894. Mrs. Abrams, do you know where your parents' families originally came from?

MA: I was always told that my father's people came from Germany, but I think it was very close to Lithuania. That was the impression I got—like over a river, sort of. I didn't know my grandmother—she died when I was an infant. My grandfather died before I was born. His name was Moses Kohler. Other people in the family have taken the name Keller, K-E-L-L-E-R. We spelled ours K-O-H-L-E-R, although on his tombstone, where he is buried in Knoxville, it's K-O-L-L-E-R with his wife K-O-H-L-E-R in front of him. The only story I knew about him was that he was a salesman of imported china—chinaware; went with a horse and buggy over the state, and he was murdered by a robber. She was left a widow with three children—three sons. The two older sons were sent to the orphanage in Cincinnati.

IA: Cleveland, I believe it was.

MA: Cleveland—it was Cleveland.

IA: I think it was B'nai B'rith's, one of the first orphanages.

MA: It was an orphan home. It must have been Cleveland. It was in Ohio. I believe you're right—it was Cleveland. And they stayed there until they graduated from school, and came back to Knoxville. I know more about my mother's side of the family. They were from Lithuania and they came from Kovno Guberniya. My grandfather came from a large family. His father was noted for his skill with figures and management, and—I guess, I don't know—maybe he was a rabbi, I'm not sure. He was employed on an estate. I don't know what they called them, whether they were generals, or just rich men that had many estates. This man that owned it would only stay on that estate for one month out of the year, and left the management to my great-grandfather. He thought so much of him that besides going to cheder, the children in that family were sent to

school. So they were all educated, and when my grandfather came to this country, he knew how to read and write.

DR: Wow.

MA: I got this information from my mother's cousin, who heard it from her mother, who was a sister to my grandfather.

DR: So this is oral history that was passed—

MA: Oral history that was passed, yes. And on my grandmother's side, I believe their business had something to do with horses, because they did that when they came to America. Her baby sister and her husband—that was their business, raising horses. That was before the car, so they had a good business.

DR: I just want to backtrack a minute. What was Moses Kohler's wife's name?

MA: Her name was Dora, I guess, in English. I think they called her Devorah—oh, I can't say it in Hebrew—Baila or something, my sister Doris Betty is named after her.

DR: Devorah?

MA: Devorah. Is that like Deborah?

DR: Yes. It's a name I've heard of for Deborah.

IA: They did call it, but Dora is what they had.

MA: Yeah. I think her English name would have been Dora.

DR: Dora or Devora. Do you know how either side of the family got to Tennessee?

MA: I'm not sure, but I have a feeling that they came down from Kentucky, because there was sort of—they sort of knew people in Kentucky and her second husband—she married, after the boys were grown and all, to a man there. I have a feeling there was a family connection.

IA: How did they get to Kentucky?

MA: Don't ask me, I wasn't there [laughing].

DR: When was this?

MA: I don't know. I don't know, but she is buried in Knoxville in the Jewish cemetery.

DR: Do you know if they came before or after the Civil War?

MA: I have a feeling that when the great wave [of Jews] came from Europe in the late 1800's that they were probably among those that came.

DR: Because there was an earlier, fairly massive immigration from Germany in the 1840's.

MA: Oh, really?

DR: So some of the German families date from the 1840's.

IA: I would think it would be after. You have pictures of the tombstones.

MA: I have pictures of the tombstones.

IA: You might look at the dates on there, and drop them a note.

MA: It's all in Hebrew.

IA: You can get the rabbi to interpret.

DR: You can get the rabbi to translate. That's actually very, very helpful. Tombstones are invaluable. They're not always right.

IA: That's right.

DR: Like the spelling.

MA: And what I always wanted to know was if her father, Dora Kohler's father, was ever in this country, because he was a rabbi and I do have one picture of him.

DR: Really?

MA: Uh-huh.

DR: How do you know he was a rabbi?

MA: I was just told that. His name was Weiner, Baruch Weiner.

DR: That's pretty remarkable that you can go back that far.

MA: Oh, I have his picture. It's well kept.

IA: Well, we can make copies of the pictures of the tombstones and the rabbi, and we can send it to you if you leave your address.

DR: That would be great.

IA: [We would] be glad to do that.

MA: You can find the negatives?

IA: No, I can find the original.

MA: It's going to be worse than that closet in there.

DR: So these are pictures you took?

IA: Of the tombstones.

MA: Of the tombstones, yes.

DR: So, you were living in Knoxville?

MA: I was born in Knoxville.

IA: Your grandmother, the one that lived in Connecticut—

MA: Rose.

IA: Rose.

MA: Her name was Rose.

IA: When did she come over here?

MA: Oh, my grandfather came over first and he worked for a year or two, earning money on a farm. He saved enough money to go back to Europe to get her and bring her over. His name was Kessler, Zelig Louis—they called him Louis Kessler, but I was told his name was Zelig. But I'm not sure Kessler was his real name, or whether the people he worked for had the name Kessler, which I imagine might have been—what do they call it? A landsman?

DR: Uh-huh.

MA: Somebody that had come over first, maybe related, maybe not.

DR: This farm was in Connecticut?

IA: Yes, that's where they—

MA: It was up north. I'm not sure what state.

IA: That's where her mother's family is—in Connecticut.

MA: My mother's family, uh-huh.

IA: She's really a Yankee, but—

MA: Half—I'm a half-breed.

DR: Half-breed. Do you know when the Kessler side of the family immigrated?

MA: No, I don't. I wish I did.

DR: And I'm just going to ask you the same question. Do you know if anything from the old world has been preserved in any of the families?

MA: If there was anything, I don't believe I have it.

DR: Not even a pair of candlesticks?

MA: No. I got candlesticks from my mother, but it didn't go back to my grandmother.

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: You don't know where she got them.

MA: I imagine she bought them.

DR: Do you remember your grandparents?

MA: Rose Kessler and Louis Kessler, yes.

IA: Yes, Rose was in our wedding.

MA: Yes.

IA: What was she, ninety-one or ninety-two, I think, then?

MA: I don't think she was that old.

IA: Yes, she was.

DR: Well, I'm going to jump back to Mr. Abrams. You're two years old and you're living in New Jersey. What happened then?

IA: No. I was living in Troy, New York. No, wait a minute—New Jersey.

DR: You went from New Jersey to Troy?

IA: From New Jersey, we went to Johnstown, New York, and then we moved to Troy.

DR: Um-hum.

IA: And I lived there until I was twelve, and that's when we came down here.

DR: Were you given a Jewish education in those years?

IA: Yes, at—what was it? Temple Beth El in Troy, New York, which I believe at the time was a Conservative temple. They had Hebrew teachers, and if you talked they threw a book at you. I mean, they were pretty strict, but I did learn Hebrew. I don't think we went to Sunday school very often, but we did go to Hebrew school about three times a week.

DR: Did you have siblings?

IA: Had two sisters older than I am. One is still living, and she is up in Virginia. The other sister was here in Greenville for years, she died in—about six years ago, didn't she? I think it was about six years ago.

DR: Did they also receive a Hebrew education?

IA: Yes, they received a Jewish education. They didn't study Hebrew and stuff, but they—I think they went to Sunday school. I don't know why I didn't. Until I got down here I didn't go to Sunday school, at least I don't recall going.

DR: Uh-huh. Would you say there were different expectations in terms of your Jewish education and your sisters'?

IA: Very much so, because they were bound and determined that I learn to read in Hebrew and I did, but they never seemed to think the daughters needed to do that.

DR: Were your sisters eventually confirmed?

IA: No, I don't think they ever were. But I was bar mitzvahed in the Temple of Israel here—the old building. I was the first one ever bar mitzvahed there, and I believe I was also in the first confirmation class that they had there.

DR: You were a Greenville pioneer.

IA: Yeah. Well, the only reason they had the bar mitzvah was because my dad wanted it. The temple, at that time, didn't believe in bar mitzvahs. This rabbi they had only believed in confirmation, but since my dad wanted it, he said okay, he would teach me.

DR: Oh, that's really interesting.

IA: I used to go two times a week to his hotel room in the Poinsett Hotel where he lived, and he

would give me Hebrew lessons. I got through it all right.

DR: Tell us a little bit more about this rabbi. I think this is the one you mentioned before.

IA: Rabbi Mazure.

DR: Mazure.

IA: Mazure, yes. He was, I guess, retired when they found him up in New York, and convinced him to come down here, and he was not married. He was very set in his ways. I mean, it was his way—that was the only way. Like I was telling you before, when you invited him to dinner he found out what you were going to have, to decide whether he would come to dinner, and then you had to have dinner at six o'clock 'cause that was the time he ate. That's the way it was. If you were late, he would come and ask you why you were late. But he was a real rabbi, he was really very dedicated to being a rabbi and even though he was Reform, and did very little Hebrew in the service, he always wore a yarmulke, a tallit, and a robe. He was ultra-Reform. But he was very good at Hebrew and very well respected in the community. He was always quoted, and anytime they wanted to know what was going on in the Jewish community, that's who they called on.

DR: What do you mean by ultra-Reform?

IA: Well, practically no Hebrew in the service and didn't believe in the bar mitzvah. He was just very Americanized, I guess you would say, but he was also very Jewish. He would never mention anything about the Germans, or the Nazis, or the Holocaust, or anything like that in the temple—would never say the words. I don't know why, but that's the way it was, and he was just his own way. A lot of times, he wouldn't cash his paychecks for three or four months. And my dad and a fellow named Bill Reyner in town—they would take him out and buy him a new suit every once in a while, because he wouldn't buy one on his own. He evidently had a good bit of money, and he left it all to a Negro college, I think in New Jersey. Some of the temple members here kind of resented that 'cause he didn't leave any money to the temple. But, it worked out all right.

DR: That's extraordinary.

IA: He was a real character, but he was a good rabbi.

DR: Where was he from?

IA: We found him in New York. Now, I don't know anything more than that about his background.

DR: But he was American born, he didn't have an accent or—

IA: No. He didn't have an accent, but I don't know that he was American born—probably was. Although, he was old enough that he might have been foreign born.

DR: I meant to ask you before, this is going back a little, but did your father speak Yiddish?

IA: Yiddish, yes. Hebrew, no.

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: He couldn't read Hebrew, as strange as that sounds. Maybe that's why they wanted me to learn. Both my mother and father could speak very fluent Yiddish, but never in front of the children because they wanted us to be Americanized, and they didn't want us to have the other language, I guess.

DR: So you never learned Yiddish?

IA: No. I picked up a few expressions, but I never learned the language. Incidentally, my grandfather, who lived in Brooklyn, New York, ran a Chinese hand laundry.

DR: Really?

IA: That's what the sign said. As far as I know, he never employed any Chinese, but it was hand laundry, they did everything by hand, and it operated there for years. When I would go to visit them, I would go with him, and he would take the pushcart, and delivered the laundry to each place. It was a very interesting experience.

DR: What was his name—your grandfather?

IA: His name was Benjamin.

DR: Benjamin Abrams.

IA: No. No. This is on my mother's side.

DR: Oh, on your mother's side.

IA: He was Benjamin Brettschneider, but really Skolnick was his actual name, but he never used it. I think he was still afraid they were going to come and get him. That was the time when he lived in an apartment that was above the laundry, and for every meal, they would go down to the grocery store or bakery, and get whatever they needed. In the wintertime the refrigerator was out on the fire escape and, of course, during the winter the ice-man came, and put a block of ice in the icebox up on the third floor. It was a different way of life then. Children could walk down the street and not be afraid, and ride the subway, and all those kinds of things.

DR: And you visited—you remember this from your own childhood?

IA: Oh, yes. We lived in Troy, New York at the time, which was upstate. Yeah, we would visit about three or four times a year.

DR: What part of Brooklyn?

IA: Bensonhurst. As a matter of fact, it was down near the water, and there was a thing called the penny bridge, where years ago they actually charged you a penny to walk across this bridge. They didn't charge it when I was there, but that was how it got its name. I used to go up there when I was eight, nine years old and ride the subway. And wherever they wanted to send me—I'd ride the subway all the way over to the Bronx zoo. By myself and nobody worried about it, but I don't think you would do that today.

DR: Bensonhurst, in particular, is a--

IA: It was a nice neighborhood. I enjoyed it there.

DR: My family came from Brooklyn too, that's why—the Prospect Park area.

IA: That was a little nicer area.

DR: Oh, yeah. My mother's salvation was the Brooklyn Museum. She spent a lot of time there.

IA: I went to—what was it—the Museum of Natural History?

DR: Or the Botanical Gardens? Oh, the one in New York—the American Museum of Natural History?

IA: Yeah, I went there a few times, but did all that by myself at that young age. It amazes me now.

DR: That is amazing. So, part of your family stayed in New York?

IA: Well, yes, all the family did, except my grandmother when she got very old, she moved down here for a few years, but all the rest of them stayed there. Although I had an uncle that finally ended up in Augusta, Georgia—Max Brett. He moved down there about 1946 or 1947, somewhere around then.

DR: Do you remember, Mr. Abrams, as a twelve-year-old when you moved to Greenville, any kind of culture shock of moving from the North to the South, or were there any differences that you remember?

IA: Well, the only differences that really stand out was I saw black people, which I saw very few up in Troy, New York, although we had maybe two in the school. I can always remember my mother when she got here had a maid and when it was dinnertime she told the maid to sit down at the table. The maid said, "Oh no, I can't do that." That always impressed me, and I wondered why she couldn't sit down and eat dinner with us. Of course, I finally figured it out, but it was a different time then. When you would go downtown, you would notice the black people walked along the curb, they didn't walk out in the middle of the sidewalk. And if they wanted to go to the

store they walked along the curb and when they got to the store they **would** go inside. So it was a very different world then.

DR: What about your schooling—your public schooling?

IA: I started here, I guess, in the sixth grade, and it was no culture shock. I seemed to fit in all right.

DR: Were you aware of being different, you know, being Jewish and different?

IA: Well, I knew I was Jewish, but I never had any real problems being Jewish. Some people were a little curious about me and I would just tell them. I know that during Passover, I always brought matzohs to class, and gave them to the kids, and they decided they didn't like those too good. But generally, I had no real difficulties being Jewish in Greenville.

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: We always seemed to get along pretty well in the community.

DR: Would you say that you lived in a Jewish community—that there were enough Jewish people here: friends for your parents and playmates for yourself, or was it pretty mixed up?

IA: Well, I had a few Jewish playmates, not too many, because they were just scattered over the city, so really, my playmates were the schoolmates that I went to school with. But I did know Jewish children, and I started in Sunday school, I guess that's why my dad helped open a temple. I knew some of the Jewish children. I belonged to—when I got old enough—I belonged to AZA, and so I was with the Jewish community to some degree.

DR: Who were your Jewish friends here?

IA: Who were they?

DR: Yeah. Which families were here then?

IA: Well, the Lureys, the Zaglins and the Blooms, and let's see, who else?

MA: Melvin Horowitz.

IA: Horowitz, yeah, and Saltzman, and gee—that's been a long time ago, it's hard to remember them all. Well, there wasn't too many, there was only about thirty families back then.

DR: Thirty Jewish families.

IA: Yeah. Well, in the temple. There was probably another thirty in the synagogue.

DR: But at least some of those families—the Lureys, the Zaglins and the Blooms were all

synagogue.

IA: They were all synagogue people, yeah. Let's see, there were Kleins. Horowitz was in the temple, and there weren't too many children in the temple at that time.

DR: Why do you smile at Horowitz? [Laughing]

MA: Well, he's being taped, he'd better—

DR: Okay. He was a character?

IA: Well, no. He worked with my dad. His mother, his wife— Horowitz's wife was a little hard to get along with. But finally a peace treaty was signed, and everything was all right. Let's see, who else was there? I'm trying to think of the earlier temple members, but they didn't have children. There was Knigoffs, Jacobis, the Adlers and Riesenfelds, but none of them had children.

DR: So this is the list that we were looking at before? The chart is Rothschild's.

IA: Yeah. Saltzmans—they had three children.

MA: Well, you knew those children.

IA: Yeah, I knew those. Yeah. There were two girls and a young boy.

SR: When you were in AZA, did you travel around the state or to other states to meet with other young people?

IA: [I] went to Charleston a couple of times and to Columbia, I believe.

SR: Did you go to play basketball or—

IA: No, just went for meetings.

SR: Meetings. Do you remember any of the people that you met in those kinds of things?

IA: I really don't know at this time. Not when I was that age.

SR: Where did you stay when you went to Charleston?

IA: Stayed in somebody's house—it was a big house. I'm trying to remember that fellow's name. Can't remember what his name was. A big house, down right near the water.

SR: Right near the water. Was it near a lake?

IA: No. No. Near the river—whatever it was.

DR: Joe Read?

SR: I don't think so, that wouldn't be.

IA: I really don't remember the name.

DR: What about your non-Jewish friends? They were kids that you met at school?

IA: Just kids at school, yeah.

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: Lived down the street.

DR: All right. Were any of them people that you made lifelong friendships with—that you continued to know of?

IA: Not really, no. I've lost contact with most of them.

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: Because the war came along, and when I was eighteen I went in service, so I really lost contact. When I came back, I didn't live in Greenville for a while. I lived over at Clemson for a couple of years and then, where did we go from there? We went to—no, we came back to Greenville.

DR: I don't want you to jump ahead too fast 'cause I want to talk some more about your dad and what he used to—you used the expression, "that's why my dad started the temple"?

IA: Well, yes.

DR: Okay. Tell us what that means, what he actually did.

IA: Well, the temple was there, and really, at the time wasn't being used. It was closed. So, he and Shep Saltzman got together with the current members, and they said, "Listen, we want to open the temple. We want our children"—Saltzman had two girls at the time—"We want our children to have a Jewish education." So the people agreed that they would try to hire a rabbi; Shep Saltzman went to New York, and found Maurice Mazure, and that's how the temple got opened. The way they raised money is: they went up and down Main Street, to anybody that was a temple member that had a retail store or whatever, and said, "Need some money." And they got enough money to pay him. Of course, I don't think the rabbi cared whether they paid him or not, because he didn't cash the checks. That's how it really got started. To start with, the rabbi taught Sunday school and he taught Hebrew individually—of course, I was the only one at the time. And that's the way it was.

DR: What exactly was your bar mitzvah like? Do you remember the occasion?

IA: What was it like? Well, I read from the Torah, I made the fountain pen speech, and we had a lot to eat.

DR: Who came?

IA: A lot of the Jewish people in the community, and a lot of the Christian people that my dad worked with came. So we had pretty nice bar mitzvah. We filled the temple—there must have been a hundred people there.

DR: Did any of your relatives who were up North come down?

IA: Let's see. I believe at the time—I believe my grandmother was there and probably my uncle was there. But other than that I don't think there were any others that came down. It was just too far—it was a real trip.

DR: That was a huge trip. And was there a party?

IA: Oh, yeah, sure. There was always a party. Yeah, my folks were great at having parties.

DR: Is that so?

IA: Yeah, had a big party at the house. We didn't have it in the temple because it just wasn't big enough to have a party. But we did have a party at the house. And of course, there were the usual presents, you know, and had a lot of fun.

DR: A lot of food?

IA: Oh, yes. Imported lox, and—we had to get that from New York or Atlanta, maybe. I don't know where they got it. Of course, my mother was a pretty good cook and she liked to bake, so we had a good old-fashioned bar mitzvah.

DR: I don't know if you can speak for your dad, but when he came down—why did he immediately go to the temple rather than the synagogue?

IA: I guess he wasn't really too involved with the synagogue in Troy, because we would go to the services on High Holy Days—once in a while maybe on Friday night, but not too often. So he wasn't really active up there, although he was always a member. I think when he came down here he felt that he was Jewish and he wanted to have something Jewish in the community and he wanted his children raised Jewish and so did Shep Saltzman. So, between those two they got things done.

DR: But he could have gone to Beth Israel. Right? Wasn't Beth Israel here?

IA: Yes, but it was more conservative then than it is now. Although it is still Conservative, but it was closer to Orthodox back then. I imagine that's why he did that, I'm not quite sure.

MA: I would imagine Shep Saltzman influenced him too. He was the boss and he—

IA: I would think so. Back then the temple members and the synagogue members didn't get along too well.

DR: And he went to work for Shep Saltzman, so that was kind of—that makes a lot of sense.

IA: Shep owned the business, and my dad ran it, so I guess that's why.

DR: Do you know anything about where Shep Saltzman's family had come from?

IA: No, I really don't. I don't know where they came from. I'm not sure.

DR: In Charleston I know it's a very different situation, but generally speaking it would take at least one or two generations, before a Russian immigrant family would move into the Reform temple. I mean, there was a pretty high wall between the—what they called the “Deutscher Shul”, the German—

IA: Yeah. Well, on my mother's side they were Orthodox.

DR: Your mother's family was Orthodox.

IA: Yeah, but my mother never really was, she never kept kosher or anything like that—although she always bought meat from the kosher butcher.

DR: And the grandmother who came down was her mother?

IA: Her mother.

DR: And that was all right, that worked out as far as kosher being—

IA: Oh yeah, it worked out fine.

DR: So your mother wasn't kosher, but she bought meat from—

IA: From the kosher butcher, yeah.

SR: And your grandmother who kept kosher didn't have any problem eating food that wasn't kosher.

IA: Well, actually, my mother was able to get kosher meat at Zaglin's meat market here in Greenville, and I guess that's what she did.

DR: And that was enough—

IA: Although she never had separate dishes or anything like that.

DR: It is one of the areas where families had to make the most compromise. They had to figure out how they could handle that.

IA: Well, my mother was pretty liberal, I think. What was it that the ladies used to march for? The right to vote and things like that?

DR: Suffragettes?

IA: She was involved in some of that. I mean, she was pretty outspoken when she wanted to be. She let her opinion out to the public. She wasn't bashful.

MA: That was up north, and we have a picture of her on the wagon with the sign.

IA: Do we still have that picture?

MA: It is in there somewhere, a snapshot.

DR: I would love to see that. Of the suffragette?

IA: You'll have to dig that out, then. You need to clean out that closet anyway.

MA: That closet.

DR: We've got another closet.

IA: You've heard of Fibber McGee, well, we've got his closet.

DR: We come into town and cause all kinds of havoc. People have to clean up—

IA: That's good.

DR: So, as a child growing up, what kinds of holiday observances do you remember? The Sabbath or the High Holidays—

IA: Well, we usually went to Friday night services—not always, but pretty often. And the High Holidays, and we always had a Passover seder. Of course, back then we usually had it at the temple—had a community seder. The other holidays, if we celebrated them, they were at the temple. Other than that, there was nothing in the home.

DR: Did you have a regular Sabbath meal, or Sabbath ritual at home?

IA: No, we never did. We didn't have any—we didn't light any candles or drink any wine or anything like that.

DR: In your mother's home, how would you describe the cooking? What kind of—

IA: Good [laughs].

DR: That was a bad question. I retract that question. Would you describe the types of food?

IA: Well, it was typical Jewish cooking, I would think. A lot of chicken fat in everything, and the gefilte fish and varenikehs. Did you ever hear of them? It is a potato in dough boiled in water and—it's probably got another name.

SR: Kasha varenikehs.

DR: Varnishkes.

SR: That's what it is—varnishkes. You're right.

DR: Kasha varnishkes.

IA: On our side of the family, they were varenikehs.

DR: That's great. That's a great. With bow-ties, bow-tie pasta and kasha?

IA: Yeah—well now, these were kind of half moon, more like a—

MA: These were rolled, and they had a filling—

IA: Yeah, but these were just—you laid the potatoes in it, and you flopped it over, and sealed the sides.

MA: Potatoes in the dough.

IA: You didn't roll it up.

DR: Oh, that's not what I'm talking about.

SR: You didn't roll it up?

IA: No. You didn't roll it up. No, then you threw them in the water, boiled them, put butter and salt on them, and they were real good.

MA: He was so fond of it he had to get my mother to learn to cook them.

SR: How do the potatoes stay in the dough?

IA: Well, you seal the dough up.

SR: You roll it, yeah. That's what I—

IA: You didn't roll it up.

SR: No. You just turned it over.

IA: Just flipped it over, and like a little turnover.

SR: Right.

DR: Like a little turnover.

IA: And then sometimes the potatoes would ooze out the side that was good.

MA: With onions in it.

IA: With onions—oh, yeah.

DR: That has nothing to do with what I was talking about. I was talking about kasha made with bow-tie pasta.

IA: We had kasha, but we just ate it plain.

DR: What about the sort of southern dishes—did they get insinuated into this cuisine?

IA: I guess later on, but we didn't have too many southern dishes then—no fatback and red-eye gravy.

SR: And no fried chicken?

IA: Oh, we always had fried chicken, but it wasn't southern fried chicken. It was breaded in flour or something. It was different than southern fried.

DR: Hominy?

IA: No. No. Farina we had, but not hominy. You remember Cream of Wheat?

DR: Uh-huh.

IA: Yeah, see, they didn't eat that in the South when we came here. We always had that, and when we were served grits, we wanted to put sugar on it, and people though we were out of our minds. We thought it was Cream of Wheat, but it was typical Jewish cooking, I would say.

DR: And did your mother have household help?

IA: Yes, she did, yeah.

DR: Do you remember any of the—

IA: Well, I told you about the one black maid she had, and she was with her for years and years. She got along very well. She was very happy with us. But my mother never could get used to the idea [that] she couldn't eat dinner with her—she never liked that.

DR: Did she do some of the cooking? Did the maid do some of the cooking?

IA: Very little. My mother did almost all of the cooking. The maid cleaned the house, and washed some of the dishes. I don't even remember Cora cooking until later on.

MA: Yeah, they didn't cook much. I think your mother was the main one.

IA: Yes, she did the cooking. If it was ten people, it was all right, and if it was twenty, she would open the refrigerator and find some more food. It didn't bother her. She never got excited; she always had enough to eat, no matter how many people were there. Later on, they had a swimming pool, and I think they had the whole neighborhood over there almost every day. My dad went in the pool one time to my knowledge, but he loved it, 'cause all the kids came over, grandkids, neighbor kids, whoever.

DR: He liked to attract a crowd. It sounds like the job he took down here was a pretty responsible position.

IA: Oh, yes.

DR: So he must have made a fairly good success.

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

IA: He was very successful with it.

DR: You've mentioned before that he and Mr. Saltzman were responsible for bringing the Hellers over. Would you tell that story?

IA: Yes. Well, I really don't know too much of the details, but as far as I can remember, Max Heller's sister, Paula, met somebody, who had visited in Austria. Met him at a party or something, and said something about wanting to come to this country. And whoever this person was, which I don't remember—Max Heller could tell you.

DR: We're going to talk to him tomorrow.

IA: Got hold of Shep Saltzman somehow, and they needed sponsors [pause in tape] I believe, but they brought the people over and I guess it was their responsibility to see that they could make a living here, which they did very well. Max went on to form his own company, became quite known in the community, and became elected mayor. In the Hyatt Hotel downtown, they named one of the big rooms after him. He made quite an impression on the community and still does.

DR: The consequences of your father's generosity—or whatever you'd call it at that time—really changed the face of Greenville.

IA: I think so. It made a difference.

DR: It's really a remarkable story—Max's story.

IA: Yeah. My sisters taught Max to speak English. Of course, the people at the plant taught him all the other words that he shouldn't know, and he'd bring those home, and we'd have to tell him what they were. But he's quite a nice fellow.

DR: He stayed with your family?

IA: Yeah. I guess, but I don't know how long it was—four or five months probably. They put him right to work. I can remember one day he came into my dad's office, and he had torn his pants. He came in, and stood in front of the desk, clicked his heels and said, "Herr Director, I ripped my pants." My dad said, "So?" He said, "Well, I want another pair." He said, "Well, go out and buy them." I don't know if Max remembers that, but I do. Over in Germany or Austria—wherever he came from—evidently the companies took care of their clothes, I don't know, but not in America.

DR: Did he really call him Herr Director?

IA: Yeah, when he first came over here, sure.

DR: Incredible.

IA: Yeah. But he picked up the language very quickly.

DR: And joined the synagogue, I presume.

IA: Yes.

DR: Not the temple.

IA: Not the temple. I don't know when he joined the synagogue, probably soon after he came, because he got on his own pretty quick.

DR: What kind of a man was Mr. Saltzman?

IA: What kind of a man was Mr. Saltzman?

DR: Was he like a very prominent guy in town at that point? He sounds like a playmaker, if you know what I mean.

IA: Well, he owned Piedmont Shirt Company, so he employed—at that time—probably about

three or four hundred people. So I guess he was important, based on the size of Greenville. [He was a] very forceful person and quick to anger. He broke more than one plate glass on his desk, he really did [laughs].

DR: What do you mean? He had a glass top?

IA: He had a glass, plate glass—you know, back then you had a nice wooden desk, and you would put a glass top on it, so you didn't ruin it. But when he would get excited he would slam his fist down on it. My dad would come in there, and calm him down, and they would get a new top to the desk. He really worked hard for the Jewish community. He did employ a lot of people, and the company prospered and it grew. Eventually he moved to New York, because the company grew so large, they set up a New York office, and he decided to go move up there. Sometime along the way, my dad left the company and went with another company.

DR: Who did he go with?

IA: Oh, he went with Dixie Shirt Company in Spartanburg.

MA: Spartanburg.

IA: They had a falling out about something—who knows what.

DR: Is that the Epstein Company?

IA: No. That's the one down in Iva?

DR: Yeah.

MA: Epstein is in Iva.

IA: No. There was no connection there.

MA: Spartanburg, right.

DR: I've heard of Dixie Shirt.

IA: Dixie Shirt was in Spartanburg. It was owned by the Cohen brothers, and I don't know if you've heard about Harold Cohen—Harold was kind of famous. During the war, he was with the Third Army with Patton, and there was a fellow named Abrams—no relation to us—he was actually a Methodist. When the tanks first went into Germany, the Abrams in charge led the tanks, and the infantry was led by Cohen. When the Germans heard Abrams and Cohen were coming—they really thought they were out for retribution, and it was written up in the news magazines and in the paper and all, Abrams and Cohen. That was his claim to fame. But my dad ran that company for them for quite a few years.

DR: Commuted to Spartanburg?

IA: He finally moved to Spartanburg and lived over there for a while and then he moved back here again.

DR: This is after you were grown and gone.

IA: This is while I was in the service that that happened, when he left Piedmont.

DR: Sandra, is there anything else you want to ask Mr. Abrams? Because I was going to go try to get a little bit of your early days and then find out how you guys got together.

SR: Not right now.

DR: Okay. What kind of a background, in terms of your childhood, did you have?

MA: Well, my family also belonged to the temple—Temple Beth El—and they were similar, they used very little Hebrew. They didn't have bar mitzvahs, but I was confirmed. I had a difficult time—we had some Hebrew classes, but I never did learn it too well. I think I learned the Shema, and maybe one or two others and that was it. What else would you like to know about myself?

DR: Do you have siblings?

MA: Yes, I have a sister. [Pause in tape] The situation was the same, as far as the blacks were concerned. I always felt—they had to sit in the back of the bus, and I don't know why, but that irked me. And I used to go on a crowded bus—people were standing—and there would be a few empty seats in the back, where black people were sitting. No one would go back there to sit. There weren't that many riding the bus, because at the time, they were so poor, they couldn't. I'd go back there and sit. That was my protest. And they would look at me like I was high-yellow or something.

SR: How old were you when you were doing that?

MA: I was in school—maybe I was fifteen.

IA: Just the family protester.

MA: It was.

SR: Yeah. What is your sister's name?

MA: Her name is Doris Betty. She is married to Ray Shapira, Dr. Raymond Shapira and he teaches at Emory University.

DR: An M.D.?

MA: Well, he has a Ph.D.

DR: Ph.D.

MA: He teaches the medical students.

IA: Biochemist.

MA: Biochemist.

DR: Your feelings about the discrimination—do you think that came from your parents?

MA: Yes. They never—I was never taught to hate. It did come from my parents—my Jewish ethics. Everyone is equal, and you should not discriminate against people.

IA: Now Marjie's mother kept kosher.

MA: Now my mother kept kosher. She also came from an Orthodox family.

IA: Separate dishes and all.

MA: But we joined the temple, and my father was Reform.

IA: Yeah, but the Orthodox people had her come down to make knaidlech for Passover.

MA: Oh, she didn't know how to make matzoh balls. There was one lady in the temple that could make delicious matzoh balls. She took the chairmanship one year just so she could stand over her, and watch her make the matzoh balls to learn how to make them. Then one year they couldn't find a president for the Sisterhood in the synagogue. They were searching and searching and Mother said, "Well, I'll take it." And although, she was a temple member and not a member over there, she went over there and she was the president.

DR: That's remarkable.

SR: It's a remarkable story.

DR: So Knoxville like Greenville had--

MA: It was a small town, yes, and I came here as a bride and Irving was in Clemson. So I only know Greenville and the Greenville area from that time—which was 1946.

IA: You remembered.

MA: That I remembered. I remember that date.

DR: But your backgrounds, in a sense, sounds like it was really quite comparable.

MA: Yes. I'm glad Irving went to these meetings, because he met a girlfriend of mine at one of

those meetings.

IA: That was in Charleston.

MA: In Charleston, and when Irving was sent to the University of Tennessee, and the—what was it? The Army?

IA: Air Force.

MA: Air Force. This girlfriend knew him, and she was at the train to meet him, and that's where I met Irving. She introduced us.

SR: What was her name?

MA: Her name was Siegel—Marian Siegel.

SR: Marian Siegel. I don't know her.

MA: I believe her folks—where did they from?

IA: Where was who from?

MA: Marian. One of those Southern states.

IA: Oh, I don't know. She's out in Kansas now, isn't she?

MA: Yeah. She's in Kansas now.

DR: When you were growing up, Knoxville had a temple and a synagogue like Greenville?

MA: A temple and a synagogue.

IA: And a Jewish Community Center.

MA: And a Jewish Community Center, because we had a benefactor by the name of Arnstein who was very wealthy. Somehow he had been in Knoxville—he built it for them, and gave them the money. Also gave them the seed money to start the new temple, I believe.

IA: Well, that brought the community together, which was good. 'Cause the temple and the synagogue children—they had the Sunday school there too, didn't they?

MA: For a while, yeah. For a while.

DR: Would Ornstien be O-R-E?

MA: Arnstein. I think it's A-R-N-

DR: A-R-N-S-T-E-I-N, Arnstein. Uh-huh. Was the Jewish community in Knoxville a twentieth-century community, where basically things started happening after 1900, or was it an older community?

MA: Well, the Jews went back quite a while there.

DR: They did?

MA: Oh, yeah. I think so. I think the Winicks were one of the very early families. They had a kosher butcher.

DR: I wonder, Jane Meyerson's family came from I think Kentucky, actually Felsenthal, but there was a big German-Jewish community—an early nineteenth-century community in that part of the country. I didn't know if there was in Knoxville or not.

MA: It was a small town, but they had enough people for a temple and a synagogue. And the synagogue was very conservative, and there weren't that many children.

IA: Well, the synagogue was Orthodox really, wasn't it?

MA: Well, yes. Yes, it was sort of Orthodox, but I think the women did sit with the men—if they wanted to.

IA: If they wanted to.

MA: A lot of my friends were from the synagogue. There weren't that many in the temple.

DR: Uh-huh. Did you also have non-Jewish friends?

MA: Yes, I think perhaps there was just a little bit more anti-Semitism there than there was here. Because I did—there were a few little incidents like: I was little, like ten, and I was going home from dancing school and heard one girl say, "Oh, here comes that Jew." When I was walking down the street, and little things like that. It wasn't really bad, but you would hear things.

DR: Did your parents ever talk to you about that? You know, how to handle yourself, or what to expect in a situation or—

MA: No. I was never attacked or anything like that, but I would just hear an undercurrent, once in a while—not too often.

DR: You know, today I hear all the time—I live in a rural area outside of Charleston—and periodically, you hear the expression "Jew me down."

MA: Oh, yes, yes. I heard that quite often. I don't know whether they actually realize that they are saying that, or what it means.

IA: Well, I've called a couple of people on that expression, and they really didn't realize—they knew what they were saying, but they really didn't realize how it came across to a Jewish person.

DR: The same as when we say, "Gypping somebody."

MA: Uh-huh.

IA: Uh-huh. The same thing.

DR: Yeah. I think that's true. It's not an intentional insult.

IA: Of course, I had people work for me that had never seen a Jewish person. And of course, some people think all Jewish people are wealthy. This particular bookkeeper I had thought that, and after I explained to her that Jewish people were just like anybody else, she began to realize that they really were. There was no prejudice; that was all she had ever run into. I guess you can't blame them if they don't know any better.

DR: But it's interesting that your perception—and you have lived in both places—is that Knoxville was a little bit more [anti-Semitic]—

MA: Just slightly more. When I came here I really never felt—I never heard anything or felt anything.

IA: No. In our community, we've been very fortunate.

DR: How do you explain that?

IA: I guess we're just isolated. I really don't know.

DR: You know, it's part of our effort in the Jewish Heritage Project to try to understand why South Carolina has been such a welcoming place for Jewish—

IA: But I do know that when the war in Israel started the second time I had all kinds of people come up to me and tell me they were praying for Israel, and this and that. They just wanted me to know—[it] was very touching to feel that. Bob Jones, which is known to be very conservative—I should say Bob Jones University. At one time, I talked to them about something I thought their radio station had said that was not favorable to the Jewish people. And they said, "Absolutely not." They wouldn't permit it; that they loved the Jews. Well, I don't know whether they do or not, but outwardly they've never made anything since then that I could really call anti-Jewish. They sure are far to the right, but it's a very interesting place. You should visit it, while you are here.

SR: We wanted to.

IA: Go to their art museum.

SR: We heard about the art museum and really want to go.

DR: Now, have you ever talked to Aron Tennenbaum about his feelings on some of the derogatory characterizations of Jews in some of their early paintings? I think that was what he was talking about. He was mentioning that last night.

IA: Aron Tennenbaum.

MA: He said early paintings done by the students, or—

DR: No. No. It's part of their collection.

MA: Well, their collections are done by the masters and I think almost all of them are original. So they are not responsible— they just got these.

SR: I guess he was referring to some sort of diorama.

DR: Right.

SR: With little figures. That was perhaps something that they had made to fill in a period of time.

MA: Now, I haven't seen that. I have been there several times, and these are—they have religious paintings. The collection is priceless and they are displayed beautifully.

DR: Uh-huh.

MA: But they are all done by the masters, you know, and quite old.

DR: I think Sandra is remembering probably—

IA: Well, that may be. I don't know; I haven't seen that.

MA: Something else. Well, at one time, they had a Torah displayed, and then I went back, and the Torah was gone—I couldn't find it. Then I went back and I think they've got it back now on display. But they don't call it a Torah, I think they call it a scroll or something.

DR: Well, to get back to your early years: you went from high school into the service when you were eighteen?

IA: No, I went to Clemson for a year.

DR: You went to Clemson for a year.

IA: And then I went into service.

DR: And tell us a little about your service years.

IA: I was in the Air Force for three years and fortunately, I didn't have to go overseas. I don't know—I never ran into any real problem in the service, to tell you the truth. Once in a while I would go to a temple, but not very often.

DR: Were you stationed here?

IA: In Greenville? No.

DR: In the States?

IA: Yeah, I was stationed in the States all the time. Like Marjie was telling you: from basic training, they sent me to the University of Tennessee for some schooling, and that's where I met her. After that, I guess I went to about six or seven different bases in this country. Flying—I originally was supposed to be a pilot, but that didn't work out. I became an aerial gunner and radio operator, and we were set to go to Japan when the war ended, so I guess we were lucky there.

DR: You got in in 1943, I guess.

IA: 1943, February of 1943. Got out in February of 1946.

DR: So what do you remember about your first meeting with Marjie?

IA: I decided that [she] was the girl I was going to marry.

DR: First sight?

IA: Yeah, and on the first date I told her that, and she didn't believe me, but as it turns out I was right.

DR: Is that the same thing you remember?

MA: First time I saw him, he had a date with my girlfriend, and I had a date. I was in the backseat, and he turned around, and he stared, and stared, and stared.

IA: Well, I wanted to be sure.

MA: [I was] embarrassed.

IA: But it worked out pretty good.

MA: Maybe he did. He said something about marriage on the first date.

IA: Well, listen, you have to make up your mind.

MA: I wish I could make up my mind that fast [laughing].

DR: It was just like a thunderclap?

IA: Yeah, that's right. Worked out very well. Used to write her a letter every day.

DR: And when did you get married?

MA: 1946.

IA: We had to graduate her from college, before her mother would let her get married.

MA: Yes. My mother wouldn't let me get married till I graduated from college. I graduated in three years [laughing].

DR: Where were you in school?

MA: University of Tennessee.

DR: What did you study?

MA: Business administration.

DR: Uh-huh. And you went back to Clemson?

IA: We went back to Clemson. Yeah, we got married and went back to Clemson. We lived on ninety dollars a month, and we got along very well. I mean, the college provided us with housing; we had a two-bedroom house—cost twelve dollars a month including electricity.

MA: We rented our furniture.

IA: Rented the furniture—that was another two dollars a month, and it was pretty nice. [We] had some great parties over there.

MA: Uh-huh. That's where we met Bernie Novit. He was in school with another one—

IA: Sam Brown was from Charleston.

SR: Did you know a Nathan Garfinkel from Charleston?

IA: Garfinkel? I don't recall that name.

MA: I don't recall that name, either.

SR: He probably wasn't there at the same time.

IA: What was this fellow's name—Lippman?

MA: Yes. Lippman, I think.

SR: Wilford?

MA: Wilford, yeah.

IA: Wilford, yeah.

MA: I was very good friends with his wife. His wife was there, too.

SR: Minita.

MA: Minita—right at the time.

IA: Didn't he end up making caskets or something down there?

SR: I don't know anything about him making caskets.

IA: He was involved with some strange stuff.

MA: Are they still around?

SR: She passed away about ten years ago, or maybe even longer.

IA: We lost touch with all those people.

MA: We lived on one end of Clemson, and they lived on the other end, and we walked all the way to their house.

IA: We had a bicycle for transportation, to go to the grocery store.

MA: That's right.

DR: One bicycle?

MA: One bicycle—with a basket on it.

IA: And we used to hitchhike to Greenville, to come visit my parents.

MA: And you could hitchhike then. We used to stand in front of the library, and someone would pick us up, and bring us right to Greenville. I never told my children that [laughing].

IA: She never told her mother, either.

MA: I never told my mother, either [laughing].

DR: Things I never told my mother.

IA: Yeah, that's right.

MA: Yeah.

DR: What were you studying, Mr. Abrams?

IA: Textile engineering.

DR: You were planning to follow in your father's footsteps?

IA: Well, really, I got into the textile end through weaving and spinning and things like that, but I finally ended up in the shirt business with my dad.

DR: I imagine Clemson must have had a very good program in textile engineering.

IA: Oh, yeah, and they still do.

DR: So what do you actually learn in that—you learn new equipment and—

IA: Well, you learn all the details about weaving, spinning, all the different facets of it. They didn't teach sewing at all, strange as it sounds.

DR: You didn't need to know that.

IA: I had to learn all that on my own.

DR: And how many children do you have?

MA: We have three children.

DR: Tell us a little about those—when they were born and their names and where they are now.

MA: Susanne was born in 1951, and she's head of the Art Department at Christ Episcopal Church—School. She's married to Bob Ripley, who did all the woodwork out in the sanctuary—if you haven't seen that, you'll have to go look. My older son was born in 1953, and he is in New Orleans. He works for Entergy, and he has two children that he raised until he got married—when did he get married, last year?

IA: And he raised them as a single parent.

MA: As a single parent—he got the children.

IA: I always claim he's the first father in Louisiana that got custody of his children.

SR: What is his name?

MA: Randall or Randy Abrams.

DR: From little kids—he raised them?

MA: Yes. The little boy was five, and the little girl was what, six and a half or so.

IA: Yeah. Six and a half.

MA: He recently got married, about two years ago. He's starting all over—she's expecting a baby. He married a lovely girl; she's Catholic. My younger one is married, and lives in Greenwood, and he's in the textile business. He works for Southern Knitters, and they have no children.

SR: And what's his name?

MA: His name is Ross.

SR: Ross?

MA: Ross Abrams—Ross Louis.

DR: I think you mentioned him.

MA: Uh-huh. His wedding was the first wedding in this temple.

DR: Is your daughter's husband Jewish?

MA: No. No. They've all intermarried.

DR: They've all intermarried.

MA: All intermarried, even though they were brought up—In fact, the one that's married to the Catholic, after he was bar mitzvahed, he wanted to go back and study more Hebrew, and he did. I don't know what happened, but he's the atheist. The other two are affiliated with the temple. Bob comes to temple, when she comes, but she serves on the board. She's finishing up her second year on the board. Ross and Patti belong to the temple.

DR: Well, don't you think it's really a matter of opportunity? That is, that they probably didn't actually meet that many Jewish people?

IA: It's hard to say.

MA: It's hard to say. Yeah, I guess so, and I guess both boys are introverts—more. They're quiet, but Sue's outgoing. She's an artist, and Bob is perfect for her, being an artist too, and he has a woodworking business. This is his second marriage, and they don't have any children. He had two grown children that are married now. They're married.

DR: When your kids were growing up, what kind of a Jewish education did they get, here in Greenville?

MA: They came to the temple, and whatever was offered they—

IA: Went to Sunday school. Belonged to the B'nai B'rith youth groups.

MA: Yes. Sue went to camp—Jewish camp.

DR: Camp Coleman?

MA: She went to Camp Coleman, but she also went to Blue Star in North Carolina. Did Randy go to Camp Coleman?

IA: I don't think so.

MA: He went to Boy Scout Camp.

IA: Yeah, he was in the Boy Scouts.

DR: Would you describe what Camp Coleman and Camp Blue Star are, and what kind—

MA: Camp Blue Star is, I guess, more conservative—they're not real conservative. It takes all types of Jewish children, and I think it may take some now that aren't Jewish.

IA: I'm not sure.

MA: I'm not sure—she went quite a long time ago. Camp Coleman is affiliated with Reform movement.

IA: HUC [Hebrew Union College], I guess, sponsors it.

MA: Yes, I think so.

DR: Maybe I'm just remembering it wrong, but I think some of the people I've talked to in Sumter were instrumental in getting Camp Coleman started.

MA: It was a lovely camp. I went down there one time, to see it.

DR: Do you know the name Isidore Denmark? Does that mean anything to you?

IA: No.

MA: No.

DR: Morris Mazursky? These are some Sumter guys; I think I remember them talking about that.

MA: I don't know.

DR: I didn't realize there were affiliations of these camps.

IA: Yeah, I'm pretty sure Coleman is affiliated with HUC.

MA: Yes.

SR: Yes, definitely. I know that.

DR: And Blue Star Camp?

IA: It's independent. There are two people out of Atlanta—

SR: The Popkin family.

IA: Popkin.

MA: Popkin, that's right. It is the Popkin family.

IA: They've run that for years and years. It's a nice camp.

SR: I think their sons are actually running it now.

IA: Probably now, yeah, I imagine so.

DR: In the years that you have been involved with the temple, how has it changed, in terms of either membership or rituals?

MA: Oh, I can tell you that.

IA: Well, membership has grown tremendously. We started out probably with twenty-eight or twenty-seven families, and now I guess, we've got close to two hundred. So it's grown quite a bit, and as you know, we're in a new building now. So it's done very well, as far as membership, and we seem to be generally increasing in members. Ritual—you tell them about ritual.

MA: When I first came to Greenville, and went to the services that Rabbi Mazure conducted, it was like our temple at home. It didn't use a lot of Hebrew, and [was] very Reformed. It has gotten—I guess the trend is that way now—it has gotten more Hebrew in it, more ritual, and some

of the older customs, like parading around with the Torah, and things like that. I think the Education Department—the Sunday school or the religious school has improved tremendously. Because when my children were growing up, they were desperate for teachers, and they used to have to make—push the parents to teach. I taught for a while, and I'm a terrible teacher. My kids used to cry that I used to pick on them, and ask them questions, you know. They were so glad to see me quit teaching, I think. But the education, I think, is much better, and they have such wonderful programs now for the young people. I read in the latest bulletins, that I just can't—that the children just have to be interested.

IA: We've got about ninety or ninety-five children in the school now.

DR: That's a lot.

IA: Yeah.

MA: I really think it's really much better than in the old days.

DR: What about sermons or music in the—

MA: We have music.

IA: Well, we've always had music.

DR: Choral music, as well as—

MA: Well, we had a choir until our choir director retired.

IA: Retired.

MA: He had physical problems, and he just sort of gave out. But the last holidays, we had a hired singer—from where was he? He had a beautiful voice. It was magnificent music.

IA: From Furman.

MA: Furman. Sometimes the rabbi has played records or recordings.

IA: Well, we still have the organist that I hired.

MA: Yes. My children's old music teacher.

IA: She used to teach music, and I convinced her. She never thought she could do it, but she stayed there all this time. She's not Jewish yet, but I think maybe she really is. She's great.

MA: Yeah. She started in the old temple, years and years ago. My children loved her so much as a music teacher. They didn't practice, but they used to love to go. At Christmas time, she would always give them a cup with homemade fudge in it. I think they would go for a year, just to

get that fudge.

DR: So your temple has always had a Gentile organist.

IA: No. No. George Riesenfield was the original organist, until he had to retire—that's when I got Mrs. Lowery.

DR: Okay.

IA: I guess I was president then. Is that why I got her, or did I just get her because they needed her? I don't know whatever.

MA: I'm not sure.

IA: Anyway, I hired her.

MA: And we have a short service—it's not really long—and a very interesting rabbi; his sermons are fabulous. It's just so—it gives you such a good feeling to come; it's just so interesting. I am never bored.

DR: There probably aren't many people who can say that—in any denomination [laughing].

IA: See, Rabbi Mazure—if somebody made a noise or something he would stop wherever he was, and until it got completely quiet, he wouldn't utter another word. But the rabbi we have now, [he] will make some kind of comment—it's usually in good fun. He's just got a great sense of humor, and so you're not afraid to speak up, if you want to.

DR: It's a friendlier—

IA: Oh, yeah, very much so.

MA: Very friendly, very friendly.

DR: Uh-huh. What about the role of women in the temple?

IA: You can't get rid of them [laughing]. No. The women are very active. I mean, they are full of ambition, in every respect of the word.

MA: They are very active. They handle the Torah and everything. We've had them read from the Torah.

IA: Matter of fact, for the last two years, we've had a woman president—Alice—and now, we have a man but—

MA: Nellie and Alice.

IA: Oh, yeah, we had two. Two in a row, yeah.

DR: Were they the first women presidents?

MA: At the temple—I believe so.

IA: I think Nellie was the first, yes.

MA: I believe she was. She's a professor at Furman.

IA: But only because they wanted to do it. I mean, up until that time, there was no reason that they couldn't; they never really expressed a desire.

SR: And what are their names?

IA: Nellie Hecker.

MA: Dr. Nellie Hecker.

SR: And Alice?

MA: Alice Schlein, S-C-H-L-E-I-N.

IA: And they were good, too.

DR: And Hecker is?

IA: H-E-C-K-E-R.

DR: Has this been a progression—the involvement of women—or has this always been true, sort of steadily, since the thirties? I mean, have women become more and more—

MA: Well, we always had the Sisterhood in the old temple. I don't think they had the—

IA: Well, they've been on the board for years, honey.

MA: Yeah, they've been on the board before.

IA: And there's never been a restriction.

MA: There's never been a restriction, no.

DR: When did the Temple of Israel start bat mitzvah, or do they do bat mitzvah?

IA: Yeah. Yeah.

MA: They do now. I don't know when they started it, though. But they do bar and bat mitzvahs.

IA: Well, I know the first bar mitzvah was in 1938, and I guess—not too long after that.

DR: That was you.

IA: That was me [laughing].

DR: Okay.

SR: Does this community have—when a male child is born, they have a bris with a party and that kind of thing?

MA: I think it's up to the family.

IA: It's up to the parents, but they do have it.

SR: Is that commonly done?

IA: Yeah, I guess.

MA: Well, it depends on the family.

SR: It depends on the family.

IA: I'd say most of them have done that.

SR: And what about baby-naming ceremonies for girls?

MA: If they wish it, they name them here in the temple.

IA: Yeah, they have it here in the temple, usually.

SR: And they usually have a little kiddush afterwards, or something?

MA: Well, we have an oneg every Friday night.

SR: I see.

IA: Yeah. We eat a lot.

MA: Typically Jewish.

IA: Incidentally, my sister was the first one married in the temple.

MA: In the old temple.

DR: In the old temple.

IA: Uh-huh.

DR: And when was that?

IA: Gee, whiz! When was that? I wasn't here. That must have been 1943 or probably 1944, I guess.

DR: Now, that building was built in 1929.

IA: Right.

DR: The first marriage was fifteen [years later]—Wow.

IA: As far as I know. Well, see, there were older people that set it up, they just didn't have children, and they didn't have a rabbi until 1937, so—and then the war came along. As far as I know, that is correct.

DR: Mrs. Abrams, this is a strange question, but because of a colleague of ours new involvement in this issue, I'm going to ask you: what is the accepted dress code for temple? What's accepted clothing for a woman to wear?

MA: Usually a dress—some of them have started wearing slacks.

IA: They wear whatever they want.

MA: But they usually don't come in jeans or too sloppy, you know. I like to wear just a dress or skirt. They don't seem to dress up.

IA: The younger people are more informal.

MA: Yes. The younger people are more relaxed and more informal. Sunday school and religious school—they don't dress.

DR: When was the first time you saw a woman in pants here?

IA: It's been a long while back.

MA: Maybe just a few years—the last few years.

IA: Naw.

MA: I don't believe I've seen them before that.

IA: Well, see, you don't look at women that much [laughing].

MA: Oh.

DR: Is that Mr. Abram's impression? You're in trouble.

IA: I'd say for at least ten years.

MA: You think so?

IA: I think so, yes.

[Deletion requested by the interviewee]

DR: What about for men? Is there any accepted kind of dress?

IA: Not really. We've got one doctor that, if he ever wears a necktie, you don't want to look at it 'cause it's the worst looking tie in the world. But I mean, usually, he just wears a sport shirt and a pair of slacks.

MA: But most of them do wear ties.

IA: Most of the men will wear a tie.

MA: But sometimes in the summer, they will be a little more casual though, and not wear a tie or a coat.

IA: That's right. We're not too formal. The important thing is that they get here.

MA: I remember when I first came to town. They dressed up for the High Holidays fit to kill with the hats, and the gloves, and the new outfits. Now it's not necessarily that dressed up. They don't go out, and buy the latest fashion from Anne Klein or whatever—big name.

SR: Now when you came here from Knoxville, and you saw women dressing up for services, was it not like that in Knoxville?

MA: It was, exactly.

SR: It was exactly like that in Knoxville.

MA: Yes. Everybody would go out and get a new outfit.

IA: Got to have a hat—the ladies did.

SR: Well, that was certainly my experience in Charleston. Women dressed up. You went shopping for the holidays. Yes, you did.

DR: Well, the other thing I've heard about Charleston High Holidays is that the women would wear furs. You know, usually it's ninety-five degrees, and that would be the time to put on the furs, and there were a lot of smelling salts [laughing] in the balcony. Talking about the old days. I want to ask you a few questions relating to kind of historic events, in terms of the Jewish community and historic events. What effect—and I know you kind of came in the middle of the Depression—but are you aware of what effect the Great Depression had on—

IA: Oh, yes, very much so.

DR: Tell us a little about that.

IA: Well, I know that when I was a kid, if you got a nickel you thought you were really rich, and you didn't get the nickels very often, because they just weren't there. Anybody that had a job was lucky, 'cause there were so many people that were unemployed. We didn't have a car, and my dad had to ride to work with somebody else, even though he was supervisor in the shirt plant. Generally, you didn't get the things that today you see children get. When you got something, it was a real event.

DR: What about in terms of the business community? Did businesses go under? Were you aware of a--

IA: I wasn't really too aware of that, although I can remember getting a triple decker ice cream cone for five cents, but that was maybe once a month; so that was a real treat. But other than that, I really don't remember too much about it.

DR: What impact do you think the Holocaust had on your sense of yourself as a Jew, and the Jewish community here?

IA: Well, I always wondered why it was going on, and I think I knew it from the time it started. I guess because of my parent's involvement in knowing what was going on over in Europe.

DR: How so?

IA: Well, somehow they knew that Jews were being killed as soon as it happened. Now, how they knew it? I'm really not sure, but they did know it and because they knew it, we knew it. We were always very concerned about it. Of course, when Max came here, that made us very aware of what was going on.

DR: Did you have family left in Europe?

IA: Not that I know of. No, we didn't on either side that I knew about. But it just—I guess it was hard at that age to comprehend what was really going on, even though we knew people were being killed. I think to this day, it affects me. When I saw *Schindler's List* the other night, it really did affect me, very much so. When I heard on the radio last night that some senator said, "They shouldn't have had that show on because of the nudity," I was fit to be tied. I really was.

SR: Do you remember who said that?

IA: Well, Jay Leno was the one who told about it, and I didn't get the senator's name.

DR: Ted told me this on the phone last night—my husband reported the same thing.

IA: I didn't get the senator's name down. I wish I had, because I would like to pay him a visit.

DR: But in terms of people's perceptions of themselves and their community, it seems like the Holocaust was a real watershed for the American Jewish community.

IA: I guess it made you more sensitive to being Jewish. It made you more sensitive to anything that was said in a negative vein—I would think it did that.

DR: Finally, what were race relations like in this community during the Civil Rights Movement of the '60s—generally in the community and, specifically, how it impacted your family?

IA: I don't think it had too much impact on the Jewish community really, but we did have people here that were very, *very* much against the black people. During the Civil Rights—let's see, I was working in Spartanburg, I was operating the plant over there. When integration came to South Carolina, which it did, I had to integrate my plant, which had been segregated because it was state law. One night, I took the maintenance crew and we just—we had separate restrooms, separate water fountains—took all the signs down. Where it said "Colored Women" and "White Women," I just put "Women" up. When people came to work the next morning, a few people said, "What did you do?" I said, "I didn't do anything." "Well, the signs are different." I said, "You can go into any restroom you want to." We actually never had a problem.

We put black sewers to work next to white people, and we had a few white people that didn't like it. I told them, "If you don't, you'll have to go work someplace else, because that's the way life is today." And they went back to work. Somehow, we got through it. We probably had more problem than most places because we did have a pretty large black work force, because anybody that pressed anything, even in our sewing rooms, was black. We didn't have any white pressers.

DR: [Inaudible] your father.

IA: Yeah. Well, he had started that and I continued it.

DR: When did he start that?

IA: I guess about 1939.

DR: When you changed the signs on the bathrooms, did the blacks keep going into the room they'd usually go to—

IA: Basically they did—

DR: —and the whites kept going—

IA: —but after about six months, I fixed that. I took the partitions down, so then it was one room.

SR: Oh, one large room had been divided?

IA: Had been divided in half, sure. And when a water fountain broke, I didn't replace it, so there was only one. We didn't force anybody, we just did it slow and easy and we got along fine. The biggest problem I had was, one day, I had a black person in my pressing department who was *really* good, and I said I'm going to make that person a supervisor. And I did. And the black people complained until I replaced her with a white person. Oh yeah, they were up in the office right away. I said, "What's the matter? This girl knows more about what's going on back there than anyone. "We don't ca—"

END OF TAPE