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Interviewee: Dora Altman (b. Nov. 22, 1896 in Charleston, SC; d. March 22, 1999 in Charleston, SC)

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Begin Tape

HE: Dora, would you tell us, like you did before, about your coming here as a little baby, and then some of the early things that you remember?

DA: Well, we came, of course, I told you, to Charleston. It was some uncle—I think it was Uncle Harry—I think he got married, and that’s how I think we got to Canada. It was Aunt Esther and Uncle Harry. He married [inaudible] and they had a family, I think. If I remember, there were three little children and we always used to find them downstairs. They’d go where she had all her pots and her pans, take all the pots and the pans out of the place and put them on the floor. We used to have such a—as soon as she got them settled they took more [laughs], until finally she said, “I give up.” She used to let them stay on the floor until I put them to bed and then they couldn’t do anything, and that’s how we got rid of them [laughs]—things like that, just little incidences that we had to go through with them.

She was a lovely person, she really [inaudible]. They moved to some place in Canada. I really don’t remember where it was, but we used to visit her all the time. I remember Celie and I

would go and see. There were lovely shops that had all kind of good fish. Every time we'd go out, she'd say, "Stop at such and such a place and bring such and such a fish home because she liked fish and we always liked fish. So we would stop on the way and get fish and she could go ahead and fix a good supper. She said it was good for you, fish is—

HE: But that wasn't in Charleston.

DA: No, no that was in Canada. [In] Charleston, all I can remember is living on Vanderhorst Street. They had a house and big yard and in the yard was a little house where the colored people stayed.

HE: Who all lived there?

DA: Just Momma and her family, us in the place, but they brought some colored people in the big yard that they had.

DR: Do you know where your parents came from in the Old Country?

DA: We used to write the address on the envelopes, something Russia, invariably. Bialystok, or something like that.

HE: Bialystok?

DA: Something like that.

DR: And Gubernia, I think, might have been the district.

HE: The town.

DR: Or the town.

DA: Yeah, because I remember we would address envelopes for her to send letters to her parents.

HE: Did your father ever live in Charleston that you recall?

DA: He must have because [it's] where we all came.

HE: Do you remember him?

DA: Yes, I remember Poppa. Poppa was tall and slim. He was a slim person. Momma was short and stout.

HE: What type of work did he do?

DA: Tailoring.

HE: Did he tailor in Charleston?

DA: Yeah.

HE: With Mendelsohn?

DA: With Mendelsohn.

HE: With Mendelsohn, he was a tailor.

DA: There was a big tailor thing—David, something—J. L. David.

HE: That was the men's clothing store.

DA: The men's clothing store.

HE: How long did you live on Vanderhorst Street?

DA: Quite a long time. When Momma and my aunt wanted to go out in the evening, I said it was all right if, when she came back, she'd bring me a bag of chocolate [inaudible]. I'll always remember that. [Laughing.] She had to put it in a certain place so when I opened my eyes, I could see that bag of chocolate [inaudible] and I was satisfied as long as she brought—they could go out and do what they wanted as long as I had that.

HE: Do you remember who they used to go out with?

DA: Just my two aunts that I remember.

HE: Your two aunts?

DA: Some aunts.

HE: Do you remember who they were—their names?

DA: Well, in Jewish, I remember [sounds like "Froomie"]; it was a Jewish name, Froomie.

HE: Sounds like nickname, really.

DR: Yeah, or an old world name. Who was it, again, that brought your family to Charleston?

HE: The Mendelsohns.

DA: The Mendelsohns. See—

HE: That's Rhetta's husband's family.

DA: —his name was Mendel and there was a son of Mendel, so they called him Mendelsohn.

HE: He was a tailor and her father was a tailor.

DA: Mm-hmm, worked in the uncle's store.

HE: Where did you go to school?

DA: I had a picture, but somebody took it. I had a picture with all of my whole class. It was a big class. Everybody always used to dig through my things and the picture was lost. It was like St. Philip Street someplace. You know where St. Philip Street was?

DR: A private school?

DA: No, no.

HE: Public school.

DA: Public school.

DR: But it wouldn't have been Memminger.

DA: No, Memminger was a high school.

HE: Was it Bennett School?

DA: There was Bennett; there was Courtenay, and it was not, I don't think, Bennett or Courtenay—I don't know.

HE: By the '20s it was Bennett. It was on St. Philip Street.

DA: Yeah.

HE: That was the only public school on St. Philip Street by the '20s. Now, I can't go beyond that. And then, where did you go to high school?

DA: I think it was Memminger.

DR: You told a story before about how your momma carried you down South?

DA: Yeah, see I was so tiny that she had a cushion she put me on because that's how she went. I think we had some relative in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and stopped at Bridgeport because she said it was too much for her to do. I think we stopped overnight or something and stayed there to sort of rest up. I have a kind of recollection of that.

HE: Did your family stay in New York for any period of time?

DA: Not too long, but I think it was something like Broome Street. It seemed to me it was Broome Street.

DR: Broome Street.

DA: That's it.

DR: That's the Lower East Side.

DA: Yeah.

DR: It sure is, yeah. Both your sisters were born—

DA: No, the older sister was born across, but the other one was born in the States—New York.

DR: Could you give me, for the record, your parents' names and your sisters' names?

DA: It's in that book wherever—

DR: These are just initials. It says A. A. W. and C. A.

DA: Let me see, Annie Altman, Cecile Altman.

DR: And Annie married—is that the W?

DA: Annie married, I think it was Charles Wilensky, and she lived in Atlanta, Georgia. Her husband was a finance officer of something that they had there.

DR: And his name was Charles Wilensky?

DA: W-I-L-E-N-S-K-Y.

DR: And your momma was?

DA: Chaya Fagel.

DR: Chaya Fagel, and then say the last name again. I see the spelling here, but it's difficult.

DA: Kurijouski. [Ed.: pronounced Kurovosky.]

DR: Kurijouski, okay. And Poppa was Gedalia Mayer Altman.

HE: Did Annie live in Atlanta for a long time?

DA: Yeah, she stayed there most all the time.

HE: Did she have any children?

DA: [Inaudible] she married kind of late in life.

HE: And he died?

DA: Yeah, he died.

HE: Is that when she came back to Charleston?

DA: I don't know [inaudible]. I have recollections of us going to sort of be with her [inaudible], and visit her and stay awhile. She had a house there and we used to go and stay with her.

HE: Did she ever move back to Charleston?

DA: No.

HE: But she was here when she was sick.

DA: Yeah.

DR: You didn't know her, Dr. Ellison?

HE: I knew her after she'd had her stroke and she was hospitalized in the nursing home; *then* I knew her, but I didn't have any communication with her.

DR: Did she have children?

DA: No, she didn't. She got married kind of late in life.

DR: What do you remember about the tailor shop where your Dad worked?

DA: I remember that my uncle, [inaudible] I guess it was not his child, but somebody's child would always come in the shop and wanted to touch everything, you know, like a child does. He always used to say, [ed.: sounds like "Gai, gai, gai, gottze dank, gai, gai, gai,"] to get her out of the way, you see. She'd go out in the yard and play in the yard until her mother would get her and bring her upstairs to take her out of the way so she wouldn't disturb them, because he used make tailored suits for people and he didn't want her around. She would always be in the way. She was a cute child. She really was cute.

HE: Do you remember who she was?

DA: I'm trying to think right now as we were talking—her first name, I thought it was Hannah, but I don't think it was Hannah. Just an ordinary name, but I can't think of it right now.

HE: Because there was Hannah Mendelsohn.

DA: Yes, we did have a Hannah Mendelsohn, but she was a bigger person.

DR: Your family spoke Yiddish at this time?

DA: When they didn't want us to know what they were saying, they would speak in Yiddish. We would say, "You're talking about us." [Laughs.] Momma said, "Why?" I said, "You're talking funny talk," because we couldn't understand her. But when they didn't want us to know, they would talk in Yiddish.

DR: So you never learned Yiddish?

DA: No, I never did.

DR: Did your parents learn English?

DA: Momma spoke, but not so well, enough to get by. I used to remember going on the weekends with her to the market to place her orders for the week. She'd say, "On Tuesday send me so and so" or, "On such and such a date send—" and they would deliver it so she wouldn't have to go. She would go on the weekend and put her order in for the different days of the week. And the next week, both Celie and I would go with her and then they would say, the darkies would say, "Here dey come, here dey come," [laughing] meaning here we are, coming to do what we have to. It was a long, long time.

DR: That was a long time. This was all before the First World War. Did your mother keep kosher?

DA: Yes, Momma kept kosher.

DR: Do you remember where she got her meat?

DA: I guess there was a Jewish butcher here. I imagine there must have been.

DR: Does the name Zalkin—

DA: That's [inaudible]. [Laughter.]

HE: Was he in business at that time?

DA: Zalkin, that name rings a bell, the Zalkins.

DR: Zalkin, I think he was here close to the turn of the century. I may be wrong, but—

HE: I remember him.

DR: You remember Zalkin?

HE: Oh, yeah.

DR: The Zalkin I've spoken to—I've interviewed Robert Zalkin, Bob Zalkin, whose grandfather started the business, and—

HE: That's what it was.

DR: —Bob Zalkin's about seventy.

HE: Yeah, he's my age.

DR: Yeah, so it could easily have been the turn of the century.

HE: Mm-hmm.

DR: Do you remember anything about the kosher butcher? What it looked like or—

DA: Well, it was like a store. Wasn't anything big, you know. It was a store where he had all of his kosher meat. Of course, he had, I guess it was a refrigerator or a freezer or something to keep it in. As he . . . needed, he'd take out a piece so he could use it as the people came and wanted, say, a pound of this or two pounds of that, so he could have it ready to give them.

DR: What shul did they go to?

DA: They went to Brith Sholom, is that it?

HE: Which is only a few blocks from where they lived.

DA: And Celie and I [inaudible]. Well see, we couldn't understand the language, so they decided that it was best for us to go where we knew what they were saying. So that's how we happened to go to Beth Elohim.

DR: When did you change?

DA: I really don't know exactly when, but Fanny Turteltaub, Celie, and I—because they said it wasn't doing us any good to go there and not understand what they were saying, and that's why they said we should go to Beth Elohim where we could read it. The book had English and Hebrew.

HE: Do you have any idea how old you were then?

DA: I really can't say.

DR: Were your parents still attending Brith Sholom?

DA: Yes, they went because they knew [inaudible]. The women would stay upstairs and the men were downstairs. I remember, like a balcony it was. Momma was always careful; she would say, "Don't make noise, don't make noise." She told me not to stir there.

DR: Do you remember when they started Beth Israel?

DA: I've gotten it written in someplace, but right now I wouldn't remember.

DR: I know the date. It was 1911.

DA: I think that rings a bell.

DR: That's an interesting event to me because there already was an Orthodox shul.

DA: Yes.

DR: So, why do you think they started Beth Israel?

DA: I guess so the other people that couldn't understand the Jewish [inaudible], the language. I guess that would be it.

DR: Some people have said it was kind of the Kaluszyner shul.

DA: What's that?

HE: They weren't satisfied that Brith Sholom was quite strict enough, and it was founded more by newcomers from the Old Country, is my understanding of it.

DR: Okay, and the newcomers, some of them, would have been from Kaluszyn—[Kaluszyn] is where the Yaschiks came from.

HE: Yeah, a lot of them came from Kaluszyn. There was a Kalushiner Society and that was the—as they would bring their relatives over.

DR: Do you remember who your friends were? Who were the other girls on the street where you played?

DA: Well, the boy that I was engaged to was Turtletaub. She was a friend.

DR: His sister?

DA: Yeah. Fanny Turteltaub, [inaudible], we used to. And then the Reads; you remember, Paul and Joe Read? They have a big store there—they were friends.

HE: Who else ran in your crowd?

DA: I remember we used to go in the yard and play some kind of thing that you roll like a ball to go through a certain thing. A crowd used to come together, and sometimes the girls would come all dressed up. We said, “Just stay there because we don’t want to get you dirty.” Of course, we didn’t care how we looked when we were playing, you know, in ordinary looking clothes. I can see us playing that [inaudible] a little thing you had to shoot through that and you’d win the game. If you didn’t, they’d put you outside, you’d stand outside. But they tried to go through that certain little thing.

HE: Do you remember who all was there playing with you?

DA: Well, the Reads used to go. I think Joe Read is still—if he sees me, he’ll remind me of some of the things. One time I needed something and he carried so many things in his store. I think Mary took me—yeah, he got something. Whenever his wife was sick—they lived on the Battery and [inaudible] used to go up there to her and sit on the porch with her and the mother used to be there.

DR: What was your fiancé’s name?

DA: Sam. They called him Samuel. They put up a big monument at the cemetery that’s out there for him, in his memory.

DR: Would you tell us what happened?

DA: He was killed over in France when he went across. He was killed in France.

HE: Was he a lieutenant when he went over?

DA: I think I’ve got some papers in there, but I can’t remember offhand.

DR: Do you remember how you got the news?

DA: I think we were at our house and I think the telephone rang. The telephone was up on a landing, you see. You would go up this far and then you take more steps and go up to it. That’s where I think we got the news when he passed—he was killed.

DR: Someone, maybe, in his family called you?

DA: I wouldn’t say; I’m really not sure. I’m not positive.

DR: Let’s see, America entered the war in 1917. Is that right? So about when do you think it was?

HE: I'm not sure. It's on the plaque.

DR: Dr. Ellison's saying that we could look on the plaque.

DA: Yeah, because it's all written on the thing.

DR: Don't be shy about speaking up. [Laughter.]

HE: There is a big plaque at the synagogue.

DR: There's a big plaque?

HE: Plus an obelisk at the cemetery [inaudible] in North Charleston—Magnolia. Brith Sholom, Magnolia has a big monument.

DR: So he was—were you still going to Brith Sholom when you were engaged to—

DA: I think we had gone to Beth Elohim on account of not being able to read Hebrew or anything. They said we weren't getting anything out of the service because we didn't know what they were talking about.

HE: Did you have, or do you recall, much Hebrew education as a child?

DA: No, we didn't. Now, the Turteltaubs did. Their father was right strict about that, and they did, but Poppa didn't bother much about that. I guess it was too much of an effort for the children; he didn't bother.

DR: If he'd had sons—

DA: Yeah, it would have been different.

HE: Did he go back to the Old Country to visit later?

DA: My mother and uncle went back. See, they took our baby pictures—they might be someplace up here—of Dora and Celie to bring back when they went on a visit to visit their parents, so they could show them what we looked like because they didn't know.

Mary? [Ed.: calling out.]

DR: Mary? [Ed.: also calling out.]

Mary: Uh-huh?

DA: Come here just a minute.

HE: But your father died in the Old Country.

DA: Look here, is that picture there with Celie and Dora?

Mary: No.

DA: No, it's not them?

Mary: No that's Charlotte.

DA: No, I don't mean that one.

Mary: This one is Jan graduating.

DA: No, but isn't there a picture with Celie and Dora?

Mary: Yeah, well, if Charlotte brought it back. Charlotte had it, remember?

DA: She did?

HE: Do you remember first going to work after school?

DA: Yeah, I used to walk to work and this man with a little buggy, he always used to pass me [inaudible]. He hired me after a while [laughing] and that's how I got my job with Swift & Company.

HE: Was this after your fiancé was killed? After Samuel was killed?

DA: Yeah.

DR: If he had not been killed, do you think you would have been married at Brith Sholom?

DA: I don't really know. I really couldn't say yes or no.

DR: It sounds like the Turtletaubs were quite Orthodox, from what you've said.

DA: No, this isn't what—this is just my mother and me.

Mary: I don't know whether Charlotte brought the rest of them back.

DA: She might have not.

Mary: I remember she was going to take one and—

DA: Up here is with my older sister. This is a friend. So, this is what I have in mind.

DR: How about this one?

DA: This is Momma and Celie, my sister Celie, in the backyard of the house.

DR: The house on Vanderhorst?

DA: Yes.

DR: Did your father buy the house?

DA: No, he just rented it from a person, but [inaudible]. There's Momma [inaudible] that summer [inaudible] people in Massachusetts we used to visit. This is Celie and one of the cousins. I thought it was [inaudible], but it's Celie and one of the little cousins.

DR: Maybe in the 1940s?

DA: Could be.

DR: These are *fabulous* pictures. At some point, I'd love to make copies of them, if I could borrow them—

DA: This picture is for Eve Levine. That is—bring it here—that's some cousin. They were in the service and they were stationed in Charleston and we used to have a bedroom that they could go to through the yard, and go into the back to the bedroom. [Inaudible] with our part of the house. It was, I think, on Pitt Street. When we'd get up in the morning, we said, "How many people did you bring over last night that we can fix breakfast for?" And we used to fix breakfast and then say, "Come on, it's ready."

But one time, this one, he was so disappointed. I went to work and we had some Rutherford's baking powder, and it had been on that shelf for such a long time that it lost all of its strength. He thought he was going to surprise me when I came home that he would have baked a cake for me. When I came home that thing was flat like a pancake and he was the most *disappointed* person you *ever* came across. So I told him, "I'm not much of a baker and that must have been here for years." [Laughing.] That's all I could tell him. I said, "I'm sorry." But he was so disappointed.

DR: He was a cousin?

DA: Yeah, a cousin from Massachusetts.

DA: See, when they were in service, they had time off, and he'd come to our house and bring some of his friends. We had that extra bedroom, so I used to [inaudible] they could go through the yard; they didn't have to come through the house. He could go up there.

December 1943; to Celie and Dora; Bob. His name was Bob.

DR: Oh, more pictures.

Mary: You want me to check and see if Charlotte has that other one? The one that she took that she was going to do over or try to have a copy of?

DA: You can call her and ask.

DR: Which Charlotte is this?

HE: She writes—

DA: Charlotte is the one that writes those plays, Charlotte Humphries.

DR: Oh, okay.

DA: I don't know what happened to her.

HE: She takes her on trips to Atlanta and New York.

DR: Really? Wow.

DA: You ought to see the books that she made with all of our trips. She's got something planned for Savannah. She thinks I'm going, but I can't go, but she says I am. All she said is, "You're going; that's *it*."

That's Celie in the backyard on Pitt Street.

DR: Here are some more sailors and soldiers.

DA: Yeah, that's them. See, we used to let them bring their friends because we were sorry they didn't have anybody down there. Their parents were in a different place.

HE: That was in World War II?

DA: Yeah.

DR: These look like the '40s, although this might be before the '40s.

DA: That's Momma and some friends and a little child. It looks like they have been pasted in a book. That was the boss who hired me—November the 12th, 1942—Mr. Fitzgerald.

DR: And you were a secretary for him?

DA: Yeah.

DR: What kind of firm?

DA: Swift & Company, meat packers.

HE: It was part of a national [inaudible], Swift and Armour.

DR: Sure, I know the name Swift.

DA: That's just a crowd—we used to go over to the beach. We had somebody to chaperone us, see, every crowd of girls and boys—and we rented like a cottage—but we always had a chaperone with us. We'd go for the weekend.

DR: Which beach?

DA: Sullivan's Island.

DR: Sullivan's? A lot of people went to Folly.

HE: Earlier.

DA: I never did.

Mary: She's out right now.

DA: Oh, she's out, okay.

Mary: She'll soon be back.

DA: That's the picture Momma took with Celie and Dora when she went to see—on her trip to see her parents in Europe to show them what we looked like because she [inaudible].

DR: *Oh*, that is a *stunning* picture, Celie and Dora. So, that might have been 1910? Something like that? When do you think that picture was made?

DA: I really can't say.

HE: Probably before that.

DR: From the age, she might be ten or—

HE: From the age, this would be ten, twelve years old.

DR: Okay. So it might have been 1906 or so.

HE: Early 1900s.

DR: Do you remember having the picture made?

DA: I think I do, for the simple reason I didn't like the way she told me to hold the umbrella. [Laughing.]

DR: Do you remember it being a studio?

DA: Oh yes, we had to go to a studio. It was on King Street. You know where Onslow's was? The candy store across the street, upstairs.

DR: Where—Onslow?

HE: Onslow's used to be, in those days, just north of Wentworth.

DA: That's right and I think the thing was Liberty Street, something like that.

DR: One of the studios I've heard of is Leidloff's. That was a big family—

HE: I think we've got some at my house.

DA: Yeah, right.

HE: We do have some old pictures, too.

DR: At some point, I would love to borrow these and make copies, if that's all right.

DA: Okay.

DR: This is a *beautiful* photograph. Are these your dresses? Did you own the dresses?

DA: Momma sewed beautifully.

DR: She made them?

DA: She sewed beautifully. She made everything.

HE: Did you work anywhere before you went to work for Swift?

DA: No.

DR: At some point, I might have to ask you again because I'm not taking notes, but go ahead and tell me who the rest of the—

DA: This is Momma, and these are some cousins in Massachusetts. I used to go to Massachusetts and stay at this one's house.

DR: But the photograph is Charleston?

DA: Oh no, it's up there.

DR: Up there, okay. This one you told me.

DA: This is Celie.

DR: Right. Who's that?

DA: That's Celie. She [inaudible]. What's that?

DR: Oval. I think it's just a description of the picture.

DA: Maybe. I think she stood as a bridesmaid for one of the twins, the Hanckel twins.

HE: How did you get friendly with the Hanckels?

DA: We were very close. They lived across the street on—what street was it? They lived right across the street from us. We were very, very close to the Hanckels.

HE: The Hanckels—

DA: The Coburg Dairy.

HE: —Coburg Dairy.

DR: Right, and that's not a Jewish family.

DA: No, they weren't Jewish.

DR: Now, there *was* a Jewish dairy family.

HE: Rephan.

DA: Rephans, that's right. I remember them, too.

DR: Yeah?

DA: I sure do.

DR: What do you remember?

DA: I think they used to live very far, Washington Street, or something like that, way far from where we lived. We used to go there after Sunday school. Sometimes some of them would come to our house. Momma would make some kind of little things—dough, she'd put dough and stretch it on a board and she would cut them and turn them over and we used to call them little diapers. The way they were fixed, they looked like diapers.

HE: What did she put in them?

DA: She put them to fix with soup, you know, let them go in the soup, not cook them, but [inaudible] through them. We used to eat them with gravy or something.

HE: Did she put meat in them?

DA: Sometimes she would put—if we wanted, she'd have chopped meat.

HE: What did you call them?

DA: Diapers! [Laughter.]

DR: Is that what we call kreplach?

DA: Kreplach, that's right. But we used to call them diapers.

DR: That's great.

HE: Were you friendly with any of my family?

DA: Sure, I knew Bertha and [ed.: sounds like "Etta"]. Bertha and [inaudible] and Dan and Mosie. [Inaudible.]

HE: Etta, too?

DA: Etta, sure. One time one of them took us out walking—I can't remember which it was—and we had new red shoes. She let us—

HE: Where did you get them?

DA: What?

HE: Where did you get red shoes?

DA: I think it was some store O'Brien or something. It was a corner store and we—

HE: Jacobs?

DA: I don't remember right now. We walked and ruined our shoes, our new shoes, and Momma said, "You had no business to do it."

HE: Did your mother work?

DA: Worked to keep us.

HE: To keep y'all.

DA: To keep us, because like I said, she did all the housework, the sewing. She sewed beautifully. Sewed all of our clothes, everything.

DR: Would she do that at the tailor shop?

DA: No, she had a machine.

HE: When did your father die? What year was that?

DA: I forgot [inaudible].

DR: 1926. So, you may be—

HE: So, he worked in the tailor shop for a long time.

DA: Poppa, yes he did. I can see the big table in the middle of the floor with everything. That little girl would always run in and he'd tell her to go, don't get in the way. She'd want to come in the touch the chalk or something, like a child would do.

DR: Do you know if most of the clientele, your father's, the people who came and had their suits made, would they have been in the Jewish community or—

DA: Not especially. We mixed a whole lot with the gentiles.

DR: Do you remember any antisemitism?

DA: No. Everything was not like things are now. It was very, very nice. No, nothing like, "You're a Jew, you stay on that side of so and so." We were close knit with all of them, closely knit.

DR: What about with the older Jewish families in town?

DA: They got together. I remember . . . you remember the Rubins? They lived across the street, upstairs and Momma would be sitting on Pitt Street on our porch, a screen porch. She'd be sitting on the porch and [ed.: sounds like "Mrs. Rubin and Mitzi"] [inaudible]—

HE: They were relatives.

DA: Yeah.

DR: The Engels and the Rubins?

DA: They used to come over and sit on the porch and talk with Momma, like on a Saturday.

DR: Which Rubin family? Because there were a number of different Rubins.

HE: Alan Rubin, which were Ben and Izzie.

DA: Yeah.

HE: You know Alan.

DR: I don't think I know Alan. I've just been working a little bit—

HE: Alan's about sixty. He's in the insurance business. They are related to the Levkoffs. That is Abner Levkoff's—that's his family, that Rubin family. I don't know their relationship to any other Rubins. I don't really recall a lot of other Rubins.

DR: There was a—

HE: There was a Moe Rubin that I—and I just remember the name.

DR: We have at the archive an early twentieth century New Year's greeting. It's a picture of a family and it is signed I. D. Rubin. I haven't really been able to—

DA: I think she went over to some place in Mount Pleasant, or one of those places is where she lives.

HE: Who?

DA: [Ed.: sounds like "Ethel"] Rubin.

HE: Alan lives over down by me on James Island.

DA: Yeah.

DR: The one lead we had on this I. D. Rubin—you're absolutely right; someone said, I think it was a daughter—is living in nursing home in Mount Pleasant.

DA: Someplace.

DR: Does that ring a bell? I don't recall the name, but I have it in my notes.

DA: [Inaudible] over the bridge there.

HE: Well, that's Evelyn's son.

DA: Yeah.

HE: That's Alan.

DA: Alan. [Inaudible.]

HE: Evelyn lived here and died two years ago.

DA: Yeah.

DR: Would any of these Rubins be related to Mitchell Rubin?

HE: Yeah, that's [inaudible] nephews, Ben, Izzie, and Mitchell.

DR: Were the three brothers.

HE: Yeah, and then there was—Pearly was the sister.

DA: Pearly.

HE: She was a Friedberg. She had no children. And then there was Beck, who married a Levkoff.

DA: That's right.

HE: And her children were Doris Meddin and Abner Levkoff and [ed.: Estelle] Poliakoff. Those were her three children. They lived in Augusta when Mr. Levkoff died in 1935 or thereabouts, and they came back. That was the Rubin clan.

DA: Pearl used to sit up on her porch and telephone us to tell us a man was walking up and down past our place, to please be sure that he doesn't come in the house. She would get on that phone and every time a man is walking past your place, be careful, don't let him see you. She was always on the watch.

DR: It sounds like you had a phone very early.

DA: Had what?

DR: A telephone. Do you remember?

DA: Oh, no. I remember it was up on a landing. We had to walk up on the second landing to—

HE: Do you remember about how old you were then?

DA: No.

DR: Do you remember your dad's first automobile?

DA: Poppa didn't ride. We never did ride in an automobile. We never had an automobile.

HE: Well remember, they lived down on Vanderhorst Street. That was within walking distance of everything that anyone needed.

DA: Everything, that's right.

HE: It was three blocks from the butcher shop. It was three or four blocks from Brith Sholom, and then another four or five blocks, because Brith Sholom, then, was on St. Philip Street, right off Calhoun. They could walk to Beth Elohim. Did you ever go way down on the Battery much in those days?

DA: [Inaudible.]

HE: But you could walk it easily.

DA: Mm-hmm.

HE: It was a twenty-minute walk. There was nothing outside of the city, remember. You took a ferry to Mount Pleasant.

DA: Yeah, that's right.

HE: You crossed the Ashley River and, as soon as you got over there, you had cabbage fields. It was all farmland. I remember that. The northwest section was farm until 1940, so everything was really within easy walking. People didn't need an automobile.

DA: Remember the Amos Drug Store?

HE: Sure. Vanderhorst?

DR: Which one?

HE: Amos at Vanderhorst and King, right across—it's now an office building.

DA: We used to like to go there and get some licorice sticks. [Laughing.]

HE: See, that was three blocks away from where they lived.

DR: Do you remember any bakery you went to?

DA: Mother did her own. Anything she wanted, she made it from scratch herself. She was a good cook.

DR: There were a couple of Jewish bakeries.

HE: Yeah, there was Rudich's.

DA: Yeah, I remember Rudich.

HE: Rudich was over on Mary Street and Collis was down King Street.

DA: I don't remember Collis, but I remember Rudich's.

HE: Those are the only two that I remember.

DR: I think the Mazursky family were bakers, but they may have been in Columbia.

HE: Mazursky's—

DA: That sounds—

DR: Morris David Mazursky.

HE: I think they were in Columbia.

DA: I thought the name sounded like somebody in Savannah—Mazursky.

DR: There was a Mazursky in Barnwell. He was actually a mayor, I think, at one point. They're related to the Rosens in Charleston.

HE: There were lots of Rosens.

DR: Right, but I'm talking about the Morris Rosen family.

HE: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. They're related to a *lot*—[Laughter.]

DR: Did you know the Rosens when they—

DA: I knew of them. I wasn't a personal friend of theirs, but I knew the Rosens.

HE: Who else were you close to?

DA: Well, as I said, the Hanckel twins who were there all the time—very close to them and we just thought if anything would happen, it was for the twins and nobody else. We were closely knit together and, of course, we were Jewish and they were Christian, but it didn't interfere. It was just like one.

HE: Their descendants, a lot interfered.

DA: Yeah. [Laughing.]

DR: Now which family are we talking about?

HE and DA: The Hanckels.

HE: They became pretty much anti—not really—I say pretty much. It was—

DA: But they were very closely [inaudible] with us.

DR: They ceased to associate so much [inaudible].

HE: Pretty much.

DR: That's interesting.

HE: There was a great deal more association in the community, when I was growing up, among—not so much among the below-Broaders, but in the rest of the community.

DR: Were you aware of other immigrant groups, people from other parts of Europe, for example?

DA: No, I really wasn't.

DR: I've heard a couple of stories about Italian neighbors and Greek neighbors—

DA: No.

DR: Were there a lot of Jewish families living in the neighborhood that you lived in?

DA: Well, I think just sparsely, here and there. I don't think they were close, all the Jews, so much.

HE: They were mixed. How far did you live from my family, that is, my grandparents?

DA: I know. I can see right now, not too far, how we would walk around and go—

HE: They had a cow.

DA: Yes.

DR: Your family had a cow?

DA: Yes, they did.

DR: Where?

HE: Down on Calhoun Street.

DA: Yes, sure.

HE: My grandparents had a cow.

DA: Grandparents—I sure remember that.

HE: They weren't in the dairy business, but a lot of people used to [inaudible].

DA: Used to come [inaudible]—and, I think, especially Passover.

DR: Tell me how your family celebrated Passover.

DA: Oh, my gosh. I really can't say. I guess the usual way that anybody had. I guess you followed the rules, like you're supposed to do.

HE: Did you celebrate it together with other families, or by yourself, just the four or five of you?

DA: I'm trying to think. There was [inaudible] used to be [inaudible] with us, [ed.: sounds like "one aunt and her people".]

HE: Did you celebrate it with the Mendelsohns?

DA: I guess it could have been them because we were very close to the Mendelsohns.

HE: How close were you to Hannah?

DA: Hannah Brown?

HE: No.

DA: Hannah who?

HE: Hannah Mendelsohn. Hannah Mendelsohn Berkman.

DA: She [inaudible] not too close to anything that was with the Berkmans. Somehow we couldn't get along too well.

HE: But I'm thinking about before she was a Berkman. She was a Berkman when she got married, and she probably got married around 1930, I guess.

DA: I don't remember, but I'm trying to think where she lived. I was not too close with Hannah; she was kind of, not peculiar, but sort of different than we were.

HE: Were you close to Harry or Mosie?

DA: Yes.

DR: Are any of these people still living?

HE: No. They were—the Mendelsohns—Harry was Rhetta’s father-in-law; Mosie was his brother. Mosie’s daughter is the one who’s the Levine on the picture that lives in Atlanta. They were not too far from your age, maybe a little younger. Were you close to their mother, Mrs. B.?

DA: Yeah.

HE: How about her husband?

DA: I don’t remember [inaudible].

HE: You don’t remember her husband?

DA: What was his name?

HE: Mendelsohn.

DA: Yeah, I know Mendelsohn, but the first name.

HE: I didn’t know him. I knew Mrs. B. and she went into business after he died.

DA: Yeah.

HE: I remember when she went into business, but I don’t recall him.

DA: They had a little store on King Street, opposite the Livingstains. [JM: the store’s address was 455 King Street, opposite Livingstain’s Hardware Store.]

HE: Right, and opened a [ed.: sounds like: “Bandbox”] downtown.

DA: That’s right, and then had a place up by Pinehaven.

HE: But that was later.

DA: Yeah, but she was really a businessperson, and I remember one time I went with her when she went shopping to buy clothes. The man said we keep [inaudible]. He said, “Anything in the store that you want, we’ll give you.” Not give you but, you know, sell it.

HE: Sell it.

DA: She was a go-getter.

DR: This is a little bit of a long shot, but I live in McClellanville, and I’ve recently heard that there was a Jewish man in McClellanville for many, many years running a general merchandise

shop. His name was I. Frankel, I think, Isaac Frankel, and he had a brother in Charleston who was a tailor. Do you remember a tailor named Frankel? That's about all I know, and it was early—Mr. Frankel died in 1939, so this would have been—

DA: No.

HE: [Inaudible] remember the name, myself.

DR: It's ama—you know how small McClellanville is.

HE: Oh, yeah. [Laughter.] I'm thinking there was a relationship with the Rubins, but this is vague.

DR: Yeah, I could ask Alice Levkoff [inaudible]. Do you know, Ms. Altman, if your parents brought anything at all from the Old Country here?

DA: No, they were glad they could get here themselves. Well, maybe that thing down there—

DR: The kettle?

DA: The kettle. I have a feeling that she brought that.

HE: Did they bring any candlesticks?

DA: All of our candlesticks were given, I think, to Celie and [ed.: sounds like "Aunt Eve"] for certain occasions.

HE: But they didn't bring any from the Old Country.

DA: I don't remember.

DR: Or a prayer book, maybe, or—

DA: Oh, well—

HE: I've got [inaudible].

DR: You do?

DA: Sol Breibart was supposed to come. I have some old Jewish things that he wants to look through and see if there's something that he could add to what he didn't have.

DR: For the archive, mm-hmm. You know, Sol's involved in this big JCC anniversary but, after that, maybe I could come with Sol and we could look together. I would love to do that, and that might be a good opportunity to make copies of the pictures.

DA: Okay.

.....

DR: Do you remember how your mother celebrated the Sabbath?

DA: All I know is Poppa always had a little blue decanter on the top shelf that was his whiskey bottle.

HE: This one?

DA: Yeah, that blue—yeah.

DR: He'd keep his schnapps in there?

DA: Yeah, and he would drink it. After he got through drinking, Celie would take the thing and put it to her mouth to see if she got anything in there from it. [Laughing.] Celie would try anything. She was like a daredevil. She would try anything.

HE: And she taught school?

DA: Yeah, she taught the fifth grade. She always liked the fifth. Annie taught the first grade. She liked the little children.

HE: Annie taught in Atlanta?

DA: Annie taught here in Charleston, and Annie used to go on Sunday to Summerville to have a Jewish—for the Jewish children to have the Sunday school.

HE: Did she have more of a Jewish education than you did?

DA: Well, she was older, so I guess she did.

HE: How old was she when she came to this country? Do you know?

DA: I don't remember.

DR: According to the record here, Annie was born in 1889, and then Celie was born in '94, so they must have come between those two dates. You know, it's possible to find records—I mean, with that amount of information, we could even possibly identify the name of the steamship. There are ways of tracing that. Did your parents tell you anything about the trip over? Anything about being on the boat or—

DA: Not that I really knew. The only thing I remember, when we wanted to go to New York, she wouldn't go on—see, the Clyde Line [Clyde Line Steamship Company] used to have boats to take you over—

HE: Coastal steamer, steamship line.

DA: It was one boat that she wouldn't go on because, she said, "When it goes, it goes sideways." She always used to say that she was afraid it was going and she always used to say which one is going? If they . . . mentioned that name, she'd say, "No, we'll have to wait and see the next one." She wouldn't go. Poppa used to take us over to the beach. She wouldn't go on the trestle, you know, to go over. It was a long thing to go over on, to ride on, and she wouldn't go.

HE: What would you ride on?

DA: On some kind of thing.

DR: A trolley? Could have because there all of those streets in Sullivan's are stations so they must have had—

HE: They had a trolley.

DR: A trolley?

HE: And that was a long trestle, the old bridge—

DA: That's what I thought.

HE: —before the Ben Sawyer, the old Mount Pleasant bridge. The trolley went on that and went across to Fort Moultrie and went down the stations.

DA: That's right. Yeah, Momma didn't like that.

HE: They used to ride the ferry from Adger's Wharf over to Mount Pleasant to Shem Creek and get on the trolley and go out to the beach.

DR: I'll bet it was a big day's trip.

DA: Oh, I should say.

HE: It was a full day's trip.

DA: Yeah.

DR: Your mother made a trip *by herself* back to Europe?

DA: No, with one of my uncles. The two of them went. Momma and her brother went back to Europe to see her grandparents. That's when she had the picture taken of the two of us, to show them what we looked like.

HE: So that would have been in 1910, '08, '06.

DR: Yeah, between 1905 and 1910. Where was the brother living?

DA: Where was what?

DR: Your uncle, her brother?

DA: I don't know. I guess he had just [inaudible], I don't know why.

DR: He wasn't in Charleston though?

DA: Yes, I think he was here.

HE: What was his name?

DA: Oh gosh, I'm blank!

DR: His last name would have been something like Kurijouski.

DA: Kurijouski.

HE: Is that his name in town, in this country, or did he change it?

DA: I would imagine they changed it, but I swear I—

HE: I don't recall any—

DA: No, I don't either.

HE: And I'm familiar with a lot of the old—

DA: They just went by Mendel and Mendelsohn, and then he just went by Mendelsohn.

HE: Do you have any cousins that you know of, besides the Mendelsohns?

DA: In Massachusetts.

HE: Nobody here?

DA: No.

DR: What I'm wondering is whether they would have left from Charleston to go back to Russia, or if they would have to go back to New York to go back to Russia.

DA: I think they had to go via New York, I would imagine.

HE: In more recent years there was no international steamship line. The Clyde Line went [inaudible] the coast and that was about it. That went three [inaudible] a week.

DR: Well, who took care of you while your mother was away? That must have been a very long trip.

DA: I guess some aunt or—yeah, because I remember . . . Momma going someplace and my aunt had me up in her—she lived over the store at that time.

HE: Who was your aunt?

DA: It was right opposite—

HE: It was Liberty Street.

DA: —Liberty Street and I remember sitting up in the [inaudible]. She had a colored girl that took care of us, see, and she stayed with us. I remember one thing, that every time—see, Momma would go every day to see how we children were and I would say, “Momma, every day, hominy.” Every day for my breakfast she would give me hominy and I got sick of it. So I’d say “Momma, every day, hominy,” for her to change and give me something different.

HE: But your mother was away then.

DA: That’s when Momma was away, but I would tell Momma about it when she came back. I wanted her to know. I said, “Every day, hominy.”

HE: The Mendelsohns were related to your mother or to your father?

DA: To Momma.

HE: How close was that, do you know?

DA: We were very close.

HE: No, I mean what was the relationship? She was—Mr. Mendelsohn wasn’t your mother’s brother.

DA: No.

HE: Was his wife—no, his wife was Mrs. B.

DA: No, she was [ed.: sounds like “B”].

HE: Joe and Burnet may know the relationship.

DR: I wonder if anybody has a family tree—in the Mendelsohn family, for example.

DA: I don't think they bothered with that. . . . I mean, I can't say, but I've never heard them speak of it.

HE: The boys might be able to draw you s—Burnet's has been [inaudible].

DA: Burnet seemed to be interested in family.

HE: He's been more interested in cemetery and all that sort of stuff, so he [inaudible].

DA: He told me when I was feeling better that one night he'd come and talk and maybe I could give him more information about some of the older—yeah, he's interested.

DR: Another thing I wonder, you talked about letters, addressing envelopes for your mother. Presumably they were *receiving* letters as well.

DA: Oh, yes.

DR: I wonder if any of those survived; if anyone kept any letters.

DA: I really couldn't say.

HE: You don't have any?

DA: Not that I know of.

HE: I imagine they were in Yiddish, and probably the girls couldn't read them and—

DA: They were. They were in Yiddish, but I remember addressing. She'd give me a bunch of the addressing. The outside [inaudible].

DR: What do you remember about Charleston during the Second World War, during the '40s? Seems like there was, from your pictures, quite an influx of soldiers and sailors.

DA: Well, they were at different [inaudible] they were stationed here. I had some fellows from some place in Massachusetts; their parents would keep in touch with us, call, and anytime I went to Massachusetts, they would always have me come over and have supper with them and things like that there. They were very nice and close to—but as you grew apart, some of them passed away. You just lose track of those things. But I remember going to their house in the evening and having dinner with them.

DR: Do you remember any rationing? Were there things that you couldn't get?

DA: No, I guess Momma always looked out, figured things out, you know.

HE: How about after—she died in 1940, didn't she?

DA: I think it was '40 or '4—

DR: 1940.

HE: Which would have been before then.

DR: Just before that.

HE: So, Momma wasn't there to do it.

DA: No, I don't think so. Momma knew how to take care of things.

HE: Have you heard from Frances lately?

DA: Frances who?

HE: Friedman. [Ed.: spelling?]

DA: Oh, Friedman. She's up north someplace. She had one daughter. She had given everybody her address and I never did get it. I told her that I will not write her unless she personally gave me her address, and she has not done that.

HE: You haven't heard from her.

DA: No. I think Caroline Triest has heard from her. I keep in touch with Caroline—she's here.

HE: How's she doing?

DA: Pretty good. She had an accident.

....

DA: Caroline had an accident one time.

HE: Yeah, I know. I know Caroline.

DR: In a way, it must be nice to have this building because you have so many friends here.

DA: Yeah, but the person who's in charge, she is just like a mother to me. She is just wonderful. She took us, Monday, over—she has a country home over at Johns Island and it's the loveliest place you have ever seen. She called ahead at the different stores to have so many sandwiches of this prepared, so many of this prepared, and all she had to do was go there and pick it up and pay her. We had the loveliest day, the loveliest lunch you could ever—we spent the whole day over there and it was lovely. She has a beautiful summer home.

DR: I'll bet these Humphries are related to my friend Jo Humphries. They also have a home on Johns—

DA: Johns Island?

DR: Yeah. How old is the lady you're talking about?

DA: I have no idea. She must be about [inaudible].

HE: She's about seventy.

DA: Oh, I don't think Charlotte's that old. Mary would know.

DR: Could be Jo's aunt. You know Jo the novelist?

DA: Mary keeps all the records for me.

DR: She knows a lot, yeah.

DA: I've had her for three years with me.

DR: After your Momma died, did you continue to keep a kosher house?

DA: Oh yes, as much as I knew. I mean, I didn't know all of the things, but I tried to keep—I saw what she used to do and I tried to do as much as I could do. I guess by degrees, you know, [inaudible] stop, [inaudible]. It got to the point where I just couldn't do it anymore.

Of course, [ed.: sounds like "everybody wanted Sister to come down here and went to Atlanta"]. She would have been a head of the house [inaudible], but she wasn't so strict either. Because we had so many goyish people, Christian people that we were close to and they were close to us. Like I said, just because you're a Jew, they didn't have—it wasn't that they didn't have anything to do with us. We were all closely knit.

DR: And I suppose when you go to people's houses, entertain back and forth—

DA: You have to do that same thing. I would go out to eat with them and I didn't think I had to eat kosher. I ate what they ordered, you know, and they ate like that.

DR: I'm not sure how long the kosher butcher was open in Charleston. Do you know?

HE: Still is.

DR: Well, there's a *new* one, the west side.

HE: Yeah, but there's been one continually.

DR: There has been?

HE: Oh, sure. Al Lash.

DR: Oh, Al Lash—after Zalkin's.

HE: After Zalkin's, and now Rosen. Because we've kept a kosher home all the time. We still do.

DR: And always ordering meat locally.

HE: Mostly. A guy in Charlotte tried to muscle in for a while. There were people that—he was offering better and cheaper, more convenient, and Lash then met the challenge and got better and they got it lassoed. He was out of Charlotte, [ed.: sounds like “shipping”].

DR: Many of the people I've talked to in smaller towns around South Carolina have ordered meat from tremendous distances—people in Spartanburg getting meat from Atlanta, and people in little towns getting meat from Charleston, and—

HE: [Ed.: sounds like “Oh yeah, they used to come in.”]

DA: I guess Momma did the best she could do and I guess, afterwards, she just had to follow suit and get something, even if it wasn't so kosher.

....

DR: How did your father pass away?

DA: Well, I can't remember what his illness was but, thank God, he didn't linger very long, which I was thankful for, *we* were thankful for. He didn't have a long illness.

HE: How about your mother?

DA: The same. Momma didn't last too long either.

DR: Do you remember your father's funeral?

DA: I just remember the house. Everything was [inaudible] open, and people [inaudible] say a prayer or something. I guess it was a prayer because then, of course, I didn't really know too much, but I'm pretty sure it was a prayer. Then everybody got back in their cars and went to the cemetery.

DR: Did the family sit shiva?

DA: Yes, they did, on boxes or something.

HE: They used to get ammunition boxes from the hardware store.

DR: That was the most available crate?

DA: Yeah. [Laughter.]

DR: How many days did they sit?

DA: I really couldn't say, I don't know. I know it's a certain time you're supposed to but, really, I wouldn't know that.

HE: Seven. Then there are various reasons why you do get up, holidays and stuff, but that's complicated and I can't—I'm sure Rabbi Radinsky can tell you.

DR: Did you do the same when your mother passed?

DA: Oh, yeah, [ed.: sounds like "treated"] both the same.

HE: She still lived on Vanderhorst Street then?

DA: When Momma died? No, I think Momma died on Pitt Street, I believe.

HE: Pitt Street?

DA: I think it was Pitt Street. I think that's the house; we had up and then down. Remember Edgar Cohen? Elizabeth?

HE: Mm-hmm.

DA: Well, it was, I think, my house—we lived downstairs, they lived upstairs. We used to call him Snookie.

HE: Snootie?

DA: Snookie. [Laughs.]

DR: Now, did your family own the Pitt Street house?

DA: [Inaudible] [ed.: sounds like "own the Pitt Street house."] I think Gussie Livingstain—was it Gussie Livingstain?

HE: Mm-hmm.

DA: I think it was Gussie.

HE: Yeah, it was Gussie.

DA: She was the one that got me to save, keep that, to get that house so I could have something of my own.

HE: That was right across the street from the Rubins?

DA: The Rubins, that's right.

HE: The Rubin's house was on Pitt Street just north of Calhoun.

DA: At the Pitt Street house, in the back of the yard we had fig trees. *Boy*, were they good! All the children in the neighborhood used to come, "Can I go back and pick some figs?" [Laughing.] They were good. The girl that we had—

END OF TAPE