

**JEWISH HERITAGE COLLECTION
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
MSS. 1035-127**

Interviewee: Alex Garfinkel (b. August 19, 1915, Charleston, SC; d. January 10, 2006, Charleston, SC)

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Note: The quality of the audio tapes is only fair at certain points in the interview, making many words difficult to hear. It sounds as if the audio is cutting in and out. See also interviews with other members of the Garfinkel family: Helen Rosenshein, Olga Weinstein, Nathan and Frances Garfinkle (Nathan spells the family name differently), Max and Jennie Garfinkel, Sandra Shapiro, and Philip Garfinkel.

Begin Tape 1, Side A

MG: Please state your full name and where and when you were born.

AG: My name is Alex [ed.: pronounced "Alec."] Garfinkel, A-L-E-X Garfinkel. I was born in Charleston on August 19, 1915.

MG: Do you have a middle name?

AG: No, I do not have a middle name.

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MG: Any explanation for that?

AG: I have three brothers who have a middle name. But I think they ran out of middle names when they got to me. [Laughs.]

MG: They just gave up on that?

AG: I think so. [Laughs.]

MG: Were you born in the hospital or at home?

AG: I *think* I was born at home, at 83 Line Street. L-I-N-E.

MG: Where exactly is Line Street?

AG: Do you know where St. Philip Street [is]?

MG: Yes.

AG: Do you know where Coming Street [is]?

MG: Yeah.

AG: Well, Line Street at that time, I believe it was the end of the city. As the city got a little bigger, it went on out. I think, but I don't know for sure, that was the end of the city. It was mostly a black neighborhood. I was born there and some of my sisters and brothers were probably born in a hospital, but I'm not positive. They tell me I was born on Line Street.

MG: Do you know who would have delivered you?

AG: No.

MG: No? Chances are it was probably Dr. Pearlstine. It's a good possibility.

AG: I don't think it was Dr. Pearlstine.

MG: That's just a wild guess.

AG: That's Kivy Pearlstine.

MG: Kivy Pearlstine, right.

AG: I don't think so. I really don't know, I'll tell you the truth. I never wanted to find out, I guess. [Laughing.]

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MG: Do you know when your family first came to America?

AG: I don't know, but I think it was in the 1890s or something in that neighborhood. I'm not positive.

MG: I'm interested in both [inaudible].

AG: My father married here. My mother went to school here. I understand she went to Courtenay School and I think she originally came from England. I'm not positive, but her sisters were here and she went to school here.

MG: Your mother?

AG: Yeah.

MG: Can you tell me what were your parents' names?

AG: Harry Louis Garfinkel and my mother's name was Celia Hannah Lapitis. [Ed.: pronounced "Lapeeduss" by the interviewee, with emphasis on the second syllable. Note spelling in BSBI Maryville Cemetery survey on JHSSC web site is Lapidus.]

MG: Can you spell that?

AG: I'll have to guess on that. . . . Did you ask my sister Flora yet?

MG: No. I haven't spoken to Flora.

AG: That's Flora Chase.

MG: I didn't know that was your sister.

AG: Lapitis. I would say L-A-P-I—

MG: D-I-S? Or is it T-I-S?

AG: T-I-S. L-A—

MG: P-I-T-I-S. Partly I'm just asking for the transcriber, so we'll have an idea what to type.

AG: Yeah, Lapitis. And she had gone to Courtenay School.

MG: Do you know where your grandparents came from?

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AG: Well, my grandparents on my father's side came from the same place. Poland, Russia—
Divin.

....

MG: Where did your mother's family come from, do you know?

AG: I don't know.

MG: Did your grandparents ever immigrate over here to the United States?

AG: My grandfather on my father's side did. The grandparents of my mother, I don't know.

MG: They never came over here?

AG: I never knew them. I never met them. I never knew them.

MG: When did your grandfather come over here?

AG: Oh, he came after my father. My father came first. Of all the boys, he was the one that came first. He came later, but I remember him when I was very little. I was born in '15, so I remember him in the early '20s. In fact, he was living with my cousin Max's father in Baltimore—the other brother, my father's brother. He was living with him, and he came back and forth to my house and he went back to Baltimore.

MG: So you had an uncle Max in Baltimore?

AG: Uncle Hyman.

MG: Uncle Hymie?

AG: Hyman. My uncle Hyman in Baltimore.

MG: How many brothers did your father have—and sisters?

AG: Well, he had two sisters—

MG: Can you tell me their names when you get to them?

AG: Yeah, the oldest one just passed away last year. She was in her nineties. Her name was Rose Garfinkel Hoffman. The other one was—we used to call her Elkie, so I imagine it was Helen. We used to call her Aunt Elkie, so I imagine Elkie is Helen. Her married name was Sklansky, S-K-L-A-N-S-K-Y. The brothers—the oldest one was Louis Garfinkel and he lived in Orange, New Jersey.

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MG: That's not your father?

AG: No.

MG: Your father went by Harry?

AG: Yeah, Harry L. Harry Louis. H. L. they used to call him. He was a mattress maker in Orange, New Jersey. His wife was Mary. Then they had my father, who was next, H. L., Harry, and the next was Max's father or Uncle Sam, Nisky's father. [Inaudible] Sam Garfinkel.

MG: So Louis, Harry, Sam—

AG: And who do we have there?

MG: We've got Rose and Helen, and Louis and Harry, your father, and then Sam.

AG: And we got Hyman. And the youngest was Philip. Let's see, we had Philip, we had Sam, and Lazer, Hyman—

MG: Lazer?

AG: That's Louis. He used to go by the Yiddish name, Lazer. There were five brothers and two girls.

....

MG: What was the chronology of how the brothers and sisters came over to the United States? Did they all come over at once or—

AG: My father came first. I really don't know if they all came in a group or separately, I really don't know. But they separated. My aunt Rose was in Savannah, Georgia. My aunt Elkie, I remember going to see her in Paterson, New Jersey, and then they moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey. That was Elkie—Helen, I guess. Rose was in Savannah. That's only two girls. Hyman, he was in Baltimore. Sam Garfinkel was in Charleston and Louis was in Orange, New Jersey.

MG: And your dad was here?

AG: Yeah.

MG: Where was Philip again?

AG: Philip was in New York.

MG: So they all pretty much dispersed.

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AG: Yeah. They all landed in New York, you see. I asked my father how come he came to Charleston, and he told me, he said they told him in New York they had a lot of landsleit—people from Divin—came to Charleston. So he decided to come to Charleston. He didn't have any large amount of money, and he said that's as far as he could have gone anyway, was to Charleston. He landed in Charleston and became a shoemaker. He showed me the store on King Street where he used to be. Then he bought this big house on Line Street and he made mattresses. He was the first one to make mattresses out of the brothers, except the one in New Jersey—he was a mattress maker. Then Sam Garfinkel became a mattress maker afterwards. He also had a little store on King Street where he fixed shoes and sold shoes before he moved to Line Street. He bought a big house on Line Street and the house is still there, 83 Line, and most of the children—I am sure I was born there. We had eight children—four boys, four girls.

MG: Did he tell you what he did before he came to—

AG: He was making boots in Europe and they wanted to put him in the Russian army and he ran away. I think he said he was seventeen. He landed in New York. I don't remember how long he stayed in New York, but I don't think he stayed too long in New York.

MG: Did he ever tell you what his parents did?

AG: His father, my grandparent—my father said he studied all the time, reading the chumash and the Bible, and his mother did the work. [Laughing.] My grandfather never worked. He was always studying, always studying, my father used to tell me. Always studying; never worked. [Laughing.]

MG: Where did he [inaudible]?

AG: He came to Charleston and they gave him a job as a shammes in the Little Shul. You remember anybody talking about a Little Shul and a Big Shul? This was the Little Shul that I belonged to later on. I went to Hebrew school there.

MG: Beth Israel.

AG: Beth Israel. He didn't stay long as a shammes. I think he passed away in the early—I don't know, was it the '30s? I'll have to go back to the cemetery to get all that information.

MG: What was his name?

AG: Wolf. Velvil. [Ed.: Note spelling on gravestone in BI Magnolia Cemetery (see JHSSC web site) is Welvie.]

MG: Would you say that again?

AG: The Yiddish is Velvil, I think.

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MG: How would you spell that?

AG: V-E-L-V-I-L, I guess. I think his name was Wolf in English.

MG: Velvil Garfinkel.

AG: Yeah.

MG: Was it originally Garfinkel in Russia?

AG: I notice that my father's name here is *Garfunkel*, F-U-N. But then I notice here, in this particular one, it's *Garfinkel*. But see, he didn't know years ago—you know what they used to do when you came into Ellis Island? They couldn't speak English, and they asked the guy, "What is your name?" And he said, "Gelbug," and it sounds like Goldberg. They put the name down as Goldberg. Mr. Goldberg, his original name was Geldbart.

MG: Oh right, I remember hearing that.

AG: So they changed it—later in the year, Mr. Geldbart changed from Goldberg to Geldbart. That was when the army and navy store [was] on King Street for years and years near Spring [Street]. Dave Feinstein is their son-in-law.

MG: Which Goldberg are you talking about?

AG: We called him Kutzel Goldberg. [Inaudible] Jewish name, Kutzel. Little short fella. He ran the army and navy store, and he had—one daughter married Wolper and one daughter married Dave Feinstein. I saw Dave the other day. He ran the army and—he was a little short fellow. Ralphie is another one. He runs the eyeglass place on George Street.

MG: Right, [inaudible].

AG: Geldbart. They changed their name to Geldbart because that was their original name. They called him Goldberg at Ellis Island. He couldn't speak, so they said, "Ah, give him that name," and hung it around his neck you know, Goldberg. [Laughs.] That stayed with him quite a few years, Goldberg.

MG: I don't know how they would come up with Garfinkel [inaudible].

AG: Well, I see here it is, Louis Garfunkel.

MG: G-A-R—

AG: G-A-R-F-U-N-K-E-L. And this one is 83 Line Street. That's where we lived at.

MG: What was the first thing you remember your father doing for a living?

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AG: He was making mattresses and he ran a scrap yard in our house. We had a nice size yard. In those years, I thought it was a big yard, but when I ride by and I look at the situation, it was a small yard. [Laughing.] But he ran the scrap yard there, and we lived there. We had a two-story house and it had a porch on top and a porch on the bottom. We had eight children there—four boys, four girls.

MG: It must have been a big house.

AG: I thought it was a big house, I really did, but you know, in today's—when you look at a house today and a yard today—not that big, not that big. It's still a nice size house because the house is—I guess a two story house, we had—I haven't been back in there since I moved from Line Street when we sold the house. My sister sold it. That's when I lived on Ashley Avenue. Your grandfather lived at Darlington right behind me.

MG: We'll get to that place in a little bit. You never remember him being a shoemaker?

AG: Not on King Street, no. I remember him on Line Street. See this was listed as 83 Line Street, and this was in 1910.

MG: Did your dad talk much about the Old Country?

AG: Well, yeah, he had friends there, but he told me it was rough—that he had to dig potatoes and dig up the ground and bury them in the ground, potatoes, you know? It was rough, he said. His momma worked hard—which was my grandmother—and his father didn't do no work. He just prayed all day long and prayed all along and daven the chumash and the Tanak, the seder. That's all he did—prayed all day long. My father said he prayed all day while his mother worked. But they say the Cossacks were very bad, very bad. They wanted to put him in the army and he left. I don't know how he got any money to go on a boat or anything, I don't know. But when he got to New York there was a big crowd there and they always got money.

MG: If I am correct, there was a society of people from Divin.

AG: Oh yeah, Divin, yeah. I asked him that same question, “How did he arrive in Charleston?” He tells me, or somebody told me, that when he got married to my mother, he didn't have a coat. He borrowed a coat from Mike Prystowsky, who [inaudible] Mike, Sam, and Jake. He was one of the brothers—Mike, Mosey, Sam, and Jake. Now they were fine people. See, I remember those people. Even though I was a kid, I remember those people. Because Jake had a cow at Pesach; he was the only one who had milk. [Laughing.] We got a cow.

MG: Did your parents have any farm animals?

AG: No. We had a horse! We had a horse and wagon at the same place on Line Street. I remember—I don't know if he bought the horse or rented the horse—but I think he bought the

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horse from a man by the name of Shuster, whose son was in our class in school, [laughing] Mitchell School.

MG: What was he used for?

AG: [Sounds like “go out and buy”] scrap. I remember when I was a little boy, I would say I was about eight years old, he gave me a roll of nickels, two dollars roll of nickels, and he told this black fellow—we called him Toe Joe—he says, “Take the horse and wagon and go with Alex and we are going to buy automobile tires, old tires.” We went down towards the Sheraton—which is over here, and that was swamp in them days, marshes, everything was—and we paid a nickel apiece for them, a *nickel* apiece for the tires and [inaudible] digging them out of the mud and everything else. We brought them back to Line Street where we had the junk yard at in the yard. I remember he ordered a box car and shipped those tires to a company called H. Muehlstein. I think they were in Philadelphia. I bought tires for a nickel apiece, automobile tires. We shipped a lot of stuff, scrap, by Clyde-Mallory Lines on a boat to, I think it was Philadelphia, because the boat stopped in Baltimore too. I was about ten years old.

MG: They would sell them for profit, basically? They would buy them—

AG: This is a company that would remanufacture tires and sold tires. In them days, they used to take your tires and strip the rubber off and mix it with the asphalt. That’s what they still do today, I think.

MG: How much did you get for them?

AG: I have no idea. My sister was keeping the books then, my older sister. We didn’t have a typewriter then and she did it in long hand, I remember.

MG: So the business was basically in your yard [inaudible]—

AG: Yes, that was the whole works right there until we moved from Line Street to Romney Street; we rented a piece of land.

MG: [Inaudible] Romney Street?

AG: Romney Street.

MG: When you were on Line Street, did you have other people working for you?

AG: Yeah, we had Sidney, a black fellow named Sidney, and we had a black fellow by the name of—I can see him right now, but I can’t remember his name. I think—Sidney I remember.

MG: Why do you remember Sidney?

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AG: Because he was there when I was little and he used to wear an apron that had two pockets on it—like an apron, two pockets. My grandfather lived next door and he used to look outside—Sidney—used to look [to see] if he was stealing anything. And his [inaudible] words were “Goodbye Charlie, goodbye Charlie”—my grandfather. [Laughing.] I remember Sidney well. Sidney stayed a long time. I think he passed away while he was working for us.

The other guy was named—maybe my sister— My sister Flora is the oldest one living now and she might remember him. I think his name was Louis, I believe. I’m not positive, but I can see his face right now. He worked on the mattresses.

I asked my father how he started the junk business and he told me, he says, “I was making mattresses and I used to go to the compresses.” You know what a compress is? You know how they make bales of cotton? The farmers would bring it to them and they would put it in this press and he would bale it up and make a bale of cotton. Everything would fall on the ground, see. A lot of cotton would fall and they called that sweepings. He would buy the sweepings. He’d go there first and buy the bands that hold the bale and I think he told me that one guy says, “You’re buying the sweepings, what about the bands?” He said, “I’ll buy that too.” So, that started the beginning of the scrap business. And he bought a battery and a radiator from a car, some brass and some copper wire that somebody stole from somebody else, and that was part of the scrap. And he started it up more and more. Then we moved. When he died, we were still on Romney Street.

MG: Your father, you’re talking about or—

AG: My father. We were still on Romney Street. My father died in 1946.

MG: That was probably the year my father was born, I think.

AG: 1946. Yeah, because my son Haskell was born in ’47, October.

MG: Yeah, maybe my dad was born in ’47.

AG: My son is 49 now, so your daddy should be—your grandfather sh—

MG: My dad’s fifty.

AG: Your dad should be fifty.

MG: Right. [Inaudible.]

AG: Yeah.

MG: So what would they do with the bands?

AG: They would sell them for scrap or steel.

MG: Oh, steel bands.

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AG: Yeah, steel bands. The bales, you know, they rolled the cotton to make a bale.

MG: Right. I didn't know they compressed it with steel bands.

AG: After they compress it, it held together. See, the press is made with slots that you could run the wire through it while it was holding together. The baler was tight, see. It was holding that cotton together and they ran the bands through it and around the bottom and it came up and you locked it in. You had about three or four bands that way and you may have had some on the sides. Then they put [inaudible] sacks on the top and bottom to keep the loose pieces from falling on the ground. That was a bale of cotton. A lot of cotton fell to the ground and that was called the sweepings.

He took it back to Line Street and he had a machine, a pick. I remember that machine was a pick. It looked like a lot of nails sticking up and it ran with an electric motor and it would clean up the cotton. The cotton came out on the other end pretty clean and he would make the ticking. He would sew the ticking first. You know what ticking is—the mattress cover. They call that ticking. And he'd buy the cloth and he'd make the mattress cover and he'd put it on the other end of the machine and it blew the cotton into it and then he'd put it on the table. He had a regular table with slats and he would sew them up with big needles and twine. Then he'd take a flat and he would beat it down, beat it down, and when he got it flat, he'd take the same needle and the twine and make tucks in it. That's when you saw the tucks around the side of the mattress. They would make it with a hand needle in these.

MG: Wow. They were hand done?

AG: Yeah, yeah. Big long needle.

MG: This is something Sidney and the other workers would do?

AG: The guy that did that work mostly was a colored fellow and I think his name was Louis. Louis and my father, together, they would make a mattress. They would sell it to some of the stores on King Street and individuals. Then he bought a bunch of stoves, I remember. We had another piece of property across the street—well, on the same side of the street, but next to our yard—that he bought stoves, cast iron, those small stoves that you put trash in and coal in it and wood in it. They came knocked down and you had to put them together. That's what he did and he sold them little stoves, little cast iron stoves.

MG: Did you take part in the business and did you work at all?

AG: Yes, I worked, and I graduated public school and then I went to high school, Charleston High School, in 192—

[Interview interrupted briefly; talking in background.]

MG: [Inaudible.]

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AG: Yeah, it was all boys then. I should have graduated in 1932, but I didn't; I graduated in 1933. I've still got my diploma.

MG: Really?

AG: Yeah. We had two other Jewish boys there in my class. Fifteen boys, I think it was, in the whole class. Of course, it was the first class ever held in February. It used to be one time a year, so they decided to make it two times a year, and the first class was in February 1933. I have the diploma.

MG: Maybe we'll come back and take a picture of that.

AG: Yeah. In fact, the lady that owns the apartment next to ours, her brother was in my class, Alex Levy.

MG: So what did you do for your father when [inaudible]?

AG: Well, I went to high school and I used to come home and change my clothes and go up on Romney Street—at that time, we had moved from Line Street to Romney Street—and I worked in the scrap yard.

MG: Was the business still at the house very much?

AG: No, we didn't [inaudible] any more at the house, because my father had rented about four acres, or maybe more, from the lawyer, J. C. Long. His father ran a wood yard there at the same location. When my father rented the land, he gave up the wood yard and we used the land. We had a scrap yard there. I'm going to think we moved to Line Street [in] '26—let's see, I was in high school and [inaudible]—I would say we moved to Romney Street— We bought a Chevrolet in 1928 and that was up on Romney Street. I would say in '27, in that neighborhood, we moved from Line Street to Romney Street. I would say 1927, because we had a new Chevrolet in '28 and that was up on Romney Street.

MG: So, did the business get better?

AG: Yeah. See we had more room to stretch out and we bought automobiles. We bought copper and brass. It was a regular scrap yard. We bought iron and we used to have to weigh it on a public scale because we didn't have a truck scale. Down the street on King Street, just beyond the Darlington Apartments, was a truck scale there. We used to send the trucks down there and weigh it. We shipped the iron to the mills from Romney Street.

MG: Did you still make mattresses?

AG: No, no. He gave that up a long time—he gave it to Sam, my uncle Sam.

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MG: Philip's father.

AG: Philip's father. He had a place on Spring Street near the bridge called Charleston Mattress Company. He was strictly in the scrap business. Then we soon bought a lot of automobiles and after we started buying the automobiles, the people would come in and want to buy the parts off them to fix up old cars. So we sold some parts. My brother Nathan was working there and my brother Hymie was working then, and Hymie went to work for the navy yard. My brother Nathan stayed on. He went to work at the navy yard for a while. Then he came back and worked in the junk yard. Them days, it was called a junk yard. I came up after school when I went to high school. I came up—

My father had remarried again. I lost my mother in 1926. She was forty-one years old.

MG: You were only eleven.

AG: Yeah, I was eleven. I lived on Line Street then. I used to change my clothes and go to the junk yard on Romney Street. After a while, after selling so many parts to different people, we decided to go into the wrecking business, auto wrecking. It was called Garfinkel Auto Wrecking. We sold parts and we sold scrap. Then Japan came along and they were buying scrap iron before the war. They were paying a good price, so we decided to scrap all the cars for scrap, because we were taking all the bodies to the dump. Just taking the motors out of them and taking the [inaudible] out—that's what we could sell for parts, and taking the bodies to the dump and dump them in the swamp. We went back there and picked it back up again after Japan was buying iron. We stayed there until 1954. Then we moved to Pittsburgh Avenue. We rented six acres. That's where my cousin Max was working, became a partner. In fact, he became a partner when we were on Romney Street, after my father passed away.

MG: Max is whose—

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

AG: —[inaudible] and we decided to sell the cars for scrap instead of trying to sell the parts off of them to Japan.

Then the war came and I went to a pre-induction examination for the war at Columbia and they put me in 1-A, but my father gave me the business in 1941. When I went to pre-induction, I passed 1-A, so I told them that I went to the draft board and I got a 1-A. You go to the draft board, which was upstairs over [sounds like "A and E"] Pharmacy up on King Street near Spring. I went up there and one of the members of the draft board was a postman and his route came to our junk yard on Romney Street delivering mail. He used to come by and he used to see me all time, you know, [inaudible] a kid, [inaudible] shortcut going to the next street. He was on the board; he knew me. His name was Mr. Sires.

So I told him—and that was essential business, being in the scrap business during the war—so I told him— He says, "Your father is still living and he ca—" I said, "No, my father can't do that." He says, "All right, all right, we will give you six month deferment." After six months, I got another letter, 1-A again. So I go back again. [He] said, "I'll give you another six

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months.” I said, “All right.” Got another letter after six months. Go back again. He said, “Now wait a minute, we can’t do that. We’re going to give you one number, one title, 2-A, and that will be all, because that’s important—scrap for the war—essential business.” I said, “Fine, thank you.” So I never went to war. Never went to camp. I went to pre-induction and that was bad enough. I was out of the war.

MG: You were doing work for the war—

AG: Yeah, I was doing essential work. We were buying scrap and selling scrap and that was essential. My father got—we got all the stamps we needed, all the gasoline stamps we needed, all the truck tires we needed, because you used coupons to buy tires and gasoline, see. So we were in high cotton. That kept me out of the army.

MG: How old were you when you moved to Romney Street?

AG: I was—let’s see now, I was still in high school, so I had to be about, let’s see, I was thirteen when I lived on Line Street— When I moved to Romney Street from Line Street, did you say?

MG: Right.

AG: Let’s see, I was about fifteen.

MG: Did you take an active part in the business before you were in high school? And did you work on Line Street?

AG: Well, I was young. I lived on Line Street and went to work from Line Street to Romney Street, but my father still ran it until he passed away in ’46. But in 1941 the wage and hour law came into effect, and he had to pay twenty-five cents an hour. In those days twenty-five cents was a lot of money, I guess, and he didn’t like it somehow or another, and so he decided to give up the business and give it to me.

I took it over from then on, and I got to the point where I couldn’t run it by myself. My brother Hymie was working at the navy yard and he wasn’t much of a worker and my brother Nathan went to work, but then he came back and worked for me. I told my cousin Max, I said, “Max, I can’t run this business by myself.” It was getting too big already. I said, “Max, I want you to come in.” Max came from Baltimore to work with my father. Then he met Jennie and got married, and he told my father he wanted a raise. I don’t know how much. Max could tell you, probably. I don’t know how much he asked for, I don’t remember exactly—five dollars more a week or something. My stepmother was living then, and he didn’t get it. I don’t think he got it, so he decided—Max’s brother-in-law was Albert Kaufman.

MG: Jennie’s brother?

AG: Jennie’s brother. He married Minnie Zucker, Bubba Zucker’s sister, older sister. Remember the Zucker [inaudible]—one got killed? They had a boy and girl, the Zuckers. I can’t

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think of his first name now [inaudible] his son. Anyway, Max married Albert Kaufman's sister. Albert Kaufman had a little grocery store on Henrietta and Elizabeth Street. He sold it to Max, and Max went into the grocery business. He had a pickup truck and he would go around picking up radiators and batteries and bring them to me.

[Interview interrupted; talking in background.]

MG: I was getting ready to ask you—

AG: If I went to work after school or something?

MG: You were saying you worked there—

AG: After school. Yeah, I worked there after school, after I got into high school, not when I was in grade school.

MG: It must have been a really interesting household to live in, having a scrap yard on your lawn every day.

AG: [Inaudible] that was the scrap yard and then my father decided to go on Romney Street. Then we gave up the yard on Line Street because it was too small to [inaudible] because we bought automobiles. I didn't start going to Romney Street until we moved there after I was in high school. I used to come home, change my clothes, put on a pair of dungarees or old clothes, and go to the junk yard. And come home with my father, and do it every day.

MG: Was your father fairly involved with the business? Did it mean a lot to him? What did it represent to him, do you think?

AG: That was his only business. See, at that time we had—the Goldberg family was in the scrap business. We had the Steinberg family in the scrap business. We had some smaller ones, a gentile guy by the name of Miller. He was downtown, but he was mostly—it was as big as this house probably, the scrap yard, a little bit bigger. But he sold everything like parts, rake, antique stuff, sort of, you know. But he was in the scrap b—Miller, W. L. Miller. We had to take him into consideration in a lot of things we did. We didn't want to do it, but we took him in.

Anyway, we had to compete with the Goldberg family and the Steinberg family, and Steinberg was a big outfit. So was the Goldberg family. My father competed with them two guys. Of course, I was there. I did a lot of bidding at the navy yard, because he took me with him to write the bids in. Now, he could add and subtract in his mind in numbers, but he didn't write so good. If I wasn't there, he probably would write anyway. But anyway, [inaudible] to the navy yard and did a lot of bidding on scrap material. Some we got, and some we didn't. He took an active part in it and he sold the brass and copper to the dealers in Philadelphia and New York. He was an active scrap man.

MG: Why do you think there were so many Jewish people involved in scrap?

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AG: I'll tell you my idea of why they were involved in scrap: because when the forefathers came from Europe, they had nothing. They used to go around and buy bottles and rags. They raised their family on that money they made, and their sons got into it. Of course, a lot of them went to college later on and became lawyers and doctors, but a lot of them stayed with the scrap. That's how they started.

Like I say, my father had a horse and wagon. Somebody had a little pushcart. He'd go around and buy rags, and from rags they made wipers. They'd pick out the [rags] and had them laundered. You know what a wiper is? They used it on the machinery, wiping the grease and stuff on— They picked the good stuff out of the rags and had them laundered, cut them to size, packed them up, and sold the boxes by the pound. It was big business. And [inaudible] rags [inaudible] people.

My father bought—I remember, it was before my time, being there—he was a Pepsi-Cola dealer. But he said the [sounds like “bottle”] was [sounds like “broken”]—seltzer water and Pepsi-Cola—way back before I was, I guess, a little guy. That I don't remember. Then he gave that up and I remember him only being in the scrap business.

When I was born, I was walking on scrap iron. I tell you, I liked it. I really did like it. I lived not far from the shul and the Hebrew school—right around the corner on St. Philip Street and by Morris Street was our shul, the Little Shul, Beth Israel. I used to go there every Saturday morning. Then I lost my mother when I was eleven and I had to go to say Kaddish. I'd be in shul on Friday, and I'd be in shul on Saturday, and I'd see these men coming down the street, you know, walking in special—these old Jewish fellows. I still remember them, it's in my mind. Mr. Steinberg, the scrap man. I could see him coming through the gates. See, the shul was way back in the yard. You had to walk about two hundred feet. I really enjoyed doing it. It was exciting to me.

MG: What kind of man was your father? What was he like?

AG: I've got a picture of my father back here. Hard working man, very hard working—had eight children. He used to go in the yard, from the house to the yard and work cleaning metal on a Sunday, and I'd say, “Poppa, let's go to Folly Beach. Come on, let's go to Folly Beach, it's Sunday.”

He wouldn't work on Shabbos, no. Friday night, he'd go upstairs, take a bath, put on his detachable collar. We had in them days the Arrow collars that were detachable. He'd come downstairs and we'd bentsh Shabbos, [ed.: speaking Yiddish?], and we'd make a Shabbos out of it. He'd finish, sit down on the couch, fall asleep, go back upstairs and undress, and go to bed. Every Friday night, he'd go upstairs, take a bath, get his collar and tie and come downstairs and make Kaddish, Shabbos, and eat, then sit down and fall asleep. Then go upstairs and undress. That's every Friday. And every Saturday, he went to shul. That's what everybody did in those days.

I started Hebrew school on George Street. There was one Hebrew school, but everybody wanted to be president. So they couldn't agree and they split up the shul, the Hebrew School, and went down to St. Philip Street. They used to call that the Little Shul. The other shul was Brith Sholom. So my father left and went down to the Little Shul. [Inaudible] Hebrew teacher, and everybody who wanted to go to Hebrew school at the [inaudible] shul joined the Little Shul. We had the rabbis come. We had Rabbi Goodman. I don't think you know the Goodman family now.

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MG: No.

AG: And we had four or five different teachers come in—rabbis. I had Rabbi Axelman. I had Rabbi Glasser, when I went to Hebrew school on George Street. My first teacher was Mrs. Allen. When I first went to Hebrew school on George Street, Mrs. Allen. Then I had Rabbi Glasser. His son was an inventor and a lawyer, but he was a little cuckoo. Instead of *riding* the bicycle, he used to *walk* the bicycle. [Laughing.]

But then I had Rabbi Speck and we had Rabbi Harowitz, who lived in the YMCA. Then we went to the Little Shul. We had Rabbi Bach, Rabbi Goodman. I know I was married there in the Little Shul. I know I went to a wedding for Izzy Mendelson and it was a double wedding one Sunday. I think it was a Sunday. Izzy Mendelson and Otto Fox had a double wedding that day.

MG: Is Izzy—

AG: Izzy Mendelson, he's dead now.

MG: Izzy Mendelson and Otto Fox?

AG: Yeah.

MG: It was a double bar mitzvah?

AG: Double wedding.

MG: Double *wedding*. Otto and Sarah Fox got married then?

AG: Yes.

MG: I am going to meet with Sarah Fox on Friday.

AG: I was at the wedding. It was a double wedding. Her brother was Izzy Mendelson—Sarah Mendelson. She was a Mendelson. Her son is a doctor—orthodontist. He's retired now. I was there because I was saying Kaddish, and I stayed there and I saw that wedding. Boy, Otto was like a white sheet. I'll never forget Otto Fox. [Laughing.]

MG: Was he nervous?

AG: Nervous! He was white as a [inaudible]. [Laughing.] In the Little Shul.

MG: Why exactly did your family switch from the Big Shul to the Little Shul?

AG: I really don't know why they left the Big Shul and went to the Little Shul, because I think some of the guys who he was very friendly with— Most of the Jewish people from the Big Shul was—like Hyman Karesh. We had Mr. Heppler, [inaudible]. Those are the lawyers and the

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doctors and they were the bigger Jews. Then there were the small Jews, like the working class Jews, like Mr. Bluestein, Sam Solomon, Barshay—not Barshay; Barshay went to the other shul. [inaudible] Jews had small stores; they were peddlers, [inaudible], had a lot of peddlers.

MG: Sam Solomon was in Beth Israel?

AG: Yeah, sure, yeah. After shul my father would go down to his house and they would have a [inaudible] and a pound cake and they would sit around and talk around the table for a while. Then they would get up and go home—on Shabbos after shul. Sam Solomon was a giant of a man, a giant.

MG: What do you mean?

AG: Good heart. Good man, good man. Sam Solomon was a number one [inaudible].

MG: I heard that he was very helpful to a lot of people [inaudible].

AG: Aw, great man, great man, great, great, great. I'll never forget him. Good man.

MG: He would give out stuff to a lot of people when [inaudible].

AG: They were peddlers. The peddlers would congregate on Saturday night. The customers would come to Sam Solomon and they'd meet the peddler. In other words, each guy had a group of customers. He'd say, "I'll be at Sam Solomon's Saturday night. You going to need anything, come on down and I'll be there." They would come down and they would meet the peddler that they did business with. They would go into Sam Solomon and they would buy the [inaudible] and be charged to the peddler. The peddler would make the price.

MG: I heard that they had some sort of minyan, or they used to daven or—

AG: Oh, yes. We used to do that sometimes in the back of the shul.

MG: —at Sam Solomon's place, I heard that people used to meet upstairs sometimes and [inaudible].

AG: They had somebody else living upstairs over Sam Solomon's. My brother-in-law Albert lived over Sam Solomon [inaudible] got married. I think Mr. Mendel Rudich, [inaudible] Seymour's father, lived over there, upstairs. His mother was Molly. Mendel [inaudible] was [inaudible] Rudich's father, Mendel Rudich—a nice guy. God, we had some nice people. We had some nice men, nice men. Sam Solomon, [ed.: sounds like "Berith"] Solomon, B. Solomon, A. M. Solomon—had a furniture store further down, by Chase—A. M. Solomon, great men. Lived at 80 Pitt Street. In fact, Mrs. Solomon was walking Otto Fox down when he got married. Mrs. Solomon on one side and Mr. Solomon on the other side.

MG: He was that nervous? Had to have someone walk with him?

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AG: At a wedding two people walked down with the groom. I can remember Mrs. Solomon. We had some great Jewish people. We had some great people, we really did. I can remember Mr. Sam Steinberg, Samuel Steinberg, the old man. The father of Samuel Steinberg now runs Charleston Steel. He had a deep voice, just a deep voice with a little bit of beard right here. You could hear him coming. But he was a fine man. And we had Mr. Lerner, the Prystowskys. I remember the grown men—with the beards—those are the guys I remember. Good men.

MG: What do you mean by the beards?

AG: They were the grandfathers of these boys I used to go out with and play baseball with. They were the grandfathers. See Jake's father, Mosey's father, Arnold's grandfather.

MG: Mostly immigrants?

AG: They were here when I was a kid and lived on St. Philip Street. When they came, I don't know.

MG: You said your neighborhood really wasn't really part of the—

AG: My neighborhood—Line Street where I was brought up was not Jewish. It was mostly black. Round the corner on St. Philip Street, by the shul, right across the street from Mr. Sam Solomon, was the Prystowskys.

MG: Did you hang out with kids on St. Philip Street?

AG: Oh yeah, we played baseball in Sam Solomon's yard. We played baseball on Coming Street on an empty lot. Any lot we saw, we played baseball on it [laughing]—if it was empty. We played on Ann Street where the damn warehouses were at and the railroad tracks were at. We played baseball there. Rudolph Robinson, Prystowsky, and Aaron Solomon. I broke Aaron Solomon's collar bone by slinging the bat. We had Morty Doobrow, oh, we had good boys, good boys.

MG: So back to your father for a minute. Aside from his work and aside from his family—and I'm talking about your mother as well, I guess—was—

AG: She died young. She died in 1941.

MG: Right. [Inaudible] 1927?

AG: '26.

MG: '26, right.

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AG: She was forty-one years old. She left eight children and my father remarried. [Inaudible] went to New York in his '28 Chevrolet that we had and he married a distant cousin. We were still living on Line Street then. Then he bought a house in Savannah and he lived there. Then he bought a house on Huger Street, and he didn't live there a year, a big house. That's when he passed away—well, he passed away in the hospital, but he lived at Huger Street.

MG: How important to your parents—I am talking about before your mom passed away, when they were still married and together—was the synagogue and Jewish religion for themselves?

AG: Very good. It was important. We didn't have no TV; we didn't have no entertainment. It was shul on Saturday morning. Friday night, we stayed home and we ate a Shabbos dinner, and Saturday morning, we went to shul. On all holidays, we went to shul. And Pesach, we went to shul. We didn't have too much free time because we—my two older brothers now, they didn't do too much work around the yard. They played around; they did everything else but work. My father told me, he said, "You're the one I am going to save." [Laughing.] He's the one I'm going to save. My younger brother, he came in. He was born—he's now, he's about, Jackie's about seventy—I'm eighty-one and a half. Let's see Jackie is about—my sister Millie is the youngest girl. I don't know how old Millie is; Millie's seventy-five, I think. Jackie must be about—how old is Jackie? [Calling to Mrs. Garfinkel (Sylvia).]

SG: Pardon me?

AG: How old is Jack—my brother Jack? How old would you say he is?

SG: He's the youngest?

AG: Yeah. How old was Millie on her birthday, April 9th?

SG: How old is Millie? His birthday was December 13th.

AG: How old was Millie on April 19th last year? Was she seventy-five?

SG: Millie was seventy-five, yeah.

AG: Seymour Rudich is one year younger than Jackie. They all [inaudible] together. Harry Appel, Jackie.

SG: Isn't that something to ask me: "How old is my sister?"

AG: She's ten years younger than you are. That I know. [Laughing.]

....

SG: He's a year younger than Millie—fourteen months.

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AG: He's in his early seventies. All I can tell you is he's in his early seventies, seventy-two, seventy-three.

MG: That's good enough.

SG: Wait a minute. Millie is seventy-five—

AG: That's close enough.

SG: Seventy-three, I would say. Wasn't it cute the way Mr. Garfinkel asked *me*. You see, my husband thinks I'm a computer. [Inaudible.]

....

SG: Millie is seventy-five and Elynor is seventy-nine.

AG: Yeah. Elynor's after me. I'm eighty-one.

SG: Well then, Jackie is about seventy-three, then. Of course, Elynor was four years older than [inaudible].

AG: Couple years apart.

MG: What were we talking about?

AG: We were talking about the Jewish people in Charleston. You asked me about the Hebrew school. How come we joined the Little Shul, was the last thing. Like I said, everybody wanted to be president, I think, and they had an argument with the guys from Brith Sholom. So they pulled out. This building was on St. Philip Street. I don't know what building it was. It must have been empty, because they had bricks in the yard. When I went to Hebrew school, they still had a bunch of bricks in the yard, and they were going to build either a church on it at one time or something, I don't remember. On George Street. I used to pass it. You know where that church is, St. Matthew's Church, facing Marion Square, before you get to the Francis Marion Hotel, that big church?

MG: Yeah.

AG: He had a clothing store there—Turteltaub. It was brothers. I don't know who the family was, but I know Max Turteltaub was a short fellow and one of the brothers got killed in the war, First World War. I used to go by there, walk from Line Street to George Street to the Hebrew school. They were building the Francis Marion Hotel then—1926.

MG: Am I mistaken to say that—was Laufer's down the street from there still?

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AG: Laufers was on uptown King Street. Laufer's was right—do you know where Sokol's Furniture Store is now?

MG: Right.

AG: Right across the street.

MG: I see. Okay.

AG: Mrs. Laufer ran the restaurant. There was a restaurant. Is that what you are talking about?

MG: Right.

AG: Mr. Laufer would go around with a fly swatter; while people were eating, he'd kill the flies [laughing]—Mr. Laufer. He was very friendly with Mr. Goldberg who ran the scrap yard—very good friends.

MG: What was King Street like back then?

AG: Busy. Busy with the stores, because people came in from the island—Johns Island and James Island—they came to King Street to shop. There was nothing over there but farms and they'd come in on the weekend and they would do their shopping on King Street. [Inaudible] was busy; Sam Solomon was busy. And they had Haverty and Rhode's furniture stores. You had drug stores. You had corner grocery stores. My brother-in-law had a grocery store—and a Piggly Wiggly on Spring Street—and they'd come in and they would buy sacks of rice, by the sacks, you know. They were busy. King Street was busy. A lot of merchants. A lot of peddlers. They'd go over the bridge; go to little towns like Hollywood, like Meggett, like Ravenel, Edisto. The peddlers had the customers. They'd come in horse and wagon. They had a wooden bridge over there—come over the bridge—a *wooden* bridge. I remember it well.

MG: A lot of Jewish people?

AG: Yes, Charleston had a lot of Jewish people.

MG: King Street [inaudible] a lot of Jewish—

AG: King Street was—St. Philip Street is the most religious street in the city of Charleston. And it went over to Radcliffe Street. Radcliffe Street had a lot of Jewish people. Sonny Goldberg's family came from Radcliffe. Mr. Kirshtein from Dixie Furniture came from Radcliffe Street.

MG: How's Sonny Goldberg doing?

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AG: I don't know. I really don't know. I wanted to go over there a couple of times to the hospital. He was still in the hospital as of yesterday, I think. In fact, my first wife was Sonny Goldberg's sister, his older sister and she passed away in 1950.

MG: For your parents, was it important, were they concerned about maintaining a Jewish identity? Was that a central part of their lives?

AG: They did, they did. My father was religious then, didn't ride on Shabbos and, like I say, my mother had a stroke when my brother Jackie was born and she died a few years after that.

MG: She died after having the stroke?

AG: Yeah. Jackie was two and a half years old when she died.

MG: She had a stroke during childbirth?

AG: Well, afterward. They tell me, but I don't know if it's true, that a nurse accidentally dropped a pitcher of cold water and she went into shock, like a stroke, and it paralyzed her left side. She could talk and she could drag her leg. I remember my father buying an electrical machine to put current into her arm so she could get back some of the—but it didn't work. She got diphtheria and that killed her two and a half years after Jackie was born.

MG: What was she like?

AG: Wonderful person. She had a sister further down Line Street—Aunt Becky—and she had a half-sister, Mrs. Livingston, that's Herbie Livingston, Melva Livingston's mother. I don't know if you know that family or not. They had—Melva [inaudible] passed away; Herbie passed away. They lost—Stanley Livingston is another brother who passed away not long ago. They came from the same mother, but different fathers. That's the Livingstons.

MG: What was your mom's—what did she do during the day? What was her daily life—

AG: She was cooking. I remember, we had a kitchen; she used to make challah. You ever see how they make challah?

MG: I've never seen it made.

AG: Put the dough down and put the powder on it and take the roller and roll it, roll it, roll it, and then turn it over and roll it and fold it up, then twist it and put it into the stove—make challah. Then she cooked gefilte fish and chicken—just a regular housewife.

MG: Your family kept kosher?

AG: Yeah, we kept kosher till—I keep kosher. I got married when I was kosher.

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MG: Still?

AG: No, no.

MG: Eat shrimp?

AG: Like hell I do! [Laughing.] You know how long before I ate shrimp [inaudible] wasn't kosher? My cousin Max—used to go every Wednesday night, Max and his wife, my wife and myself, and my brother—

END OF TAPE