LEON DAVE ROCAMORA

Q. Tell me what your name is and your birthdate.

A. My name is Leon Dave Rocamora; born May 3, 1920, here in Asheville, in--one of the few native Ashevilleans still around. I hope I'll be here a few more years, to say that.

Q. (laughter) That's good. Well, so where did your family come from, and where, on your father's side and on your mother's side?

A. My father and mother both came from Hamburg, Germany. That was their home when they were born and raised. And they arrived in 1918, and first lived in Pittsburgh, Massachusetts a couple of years. And why he came to Asheville, I don't have any records or knowledge of it. But he came here in 1920.

Q. The year you were born…

A. The year I was born.

Q. So, were they married in Germany?

A. Right.

Q. They came to America together and they were married. Do you know what year your father was born and your mother was born?

A. I believe he was born in 1885, because he died in 1935 at 50 years old. Died of influenza. Got sick Friday, and Sunday he passed away.

Q. And do you know what year your mom was born?

A. Probably 8 years later.

Q. Now, what kind of name is Rocamora?—it doesn't sound German…

A. No, it's Portuguese, going back. Had a cousin traced our family tree back to 1400's I think; and there was a priest who was a monk, and that's as far back as we've been able to find out where our family name started from, our family tree.

Q. So was he one of the Jews who had to become Christian, or…

A. He didn't say. He just said that they traced it back to 1400's and such.

Q. O.K. Well, now, let's go back to your parents. Did they live in a town in Massachusetts because they had any family there?

A. No, no family here.

Q. Did they have any family in America?

A. Not that I know of. They just came here, right before the war ended or right after WWI ended.

Q. Now, was your brother born then? Was he born in America or Germany?

A. Here. He is younger. He was born in 1924.

Q. So when your family came here, your parents, was it just them that came, or—

A. At that time, yes, although he had a brother in New York. Uh, when he came over, I don't know—whether he came over before—he was an older brother—in fact he had two older brothers, living in New York. One was a William Rocamora, and another is Zimmie Rocamora. They were New Yorkers. And my mother was

one of 13 children; and gradually some of those brothers and sisters were brought over to this country.

Q. Was that before the Holocaust, or after?

A. After.

Q. Did she lose brothers and sisters in the Holocaust?

A. She lost one sister, and she brought over one sister that was a survivor.

Q. Who was that?—which one?

A. I don't remember which one…

Q. Did she live in Asheville?

A. For the time being, yeah.

Q. It wasn't Mary?

A. Oh no. No, this is another one.

Q. What was your mother's maiden name?

A. Baruch.

Q. What was your mother's first name?

A. Fannie.

Q. O.K. So you all—your parents—were sort of the first Rocamora's in the South, in your line?

A. As far as I know.

Q. So, when you were small, how many people lived in your household? Did anyone outside of immediate family live in your household? Did you have boarders or anything?

A. Oh yeah. My mother took in boarders, I guess during the Depression years—quite a few of them, through the years.

Q. Was that after your father died, or before?

A. Before. After he died, she had to come into the business and run the business. She knew nothing about the business. She had a business of her own: a hat store up on Patton Avenue. .

Q. What was it called?

A. I don't remember…her and Dora.

Q. Oh yeah—my aunt.

A. Yes, your aunt. They were real close. Now whether your Aunt Dora took over my mother's hat store…

Q. I think she did.

A. I don't remember exactly, but they were real close.

Q. Well, let's see…where did your family live when you took in boarders? Or do you remember the different houses? Did you live in more than one house?

A. I jokingly say-- the joking is true—between the time I was born and WWII, we lived in 21 different houses. (laughter) I think I heard my dad say it was cheaper

to move than it was to pay rent. (laughter) I was born on Arlington Street. We lived there, and on Linden Avenue, and Clayton, and Lake Shore Drive, Mt. Vernon Circle, and uh, Macon Avenue. I don't remember where all it was. Back on Lake Shore Drive, Merrimon Avenue, we lived in the apartments there near the fire department. When I sat down one day and wrote them all down—21 different places that we lived…

Q. Wow. So when your father was alive, you all never owned a house, you rented?

A. No. He had a struggle, as did I think most of them, I think, really.

Q. When your mom took in boarders though, it was probably mostly when you were not in north Asheville, right? Or did she take in boarders in north Asheville?

A. I don't remember whether she took in boarders there. That was back in the early 30's. That may have been after we lived on North Liberty, there, diagonally across from the Temple. And I remember we had a lot of boarders there. A lot of them came back every year to stay with us. My mother had the reputation of being an excellent cook.

Q. Ahhh. Now were these Jewish people or not Jewish people?

A. Both.

Q. Were they relatives?

A. No. We had people from Alabama, Pennsylvania; there was a couple from Guatemala that stayed with us. One that stayed with us many, many years was from Midland, Pennsylvania—Aaron Green. He was—I don't know whether he was a bachelor—never had a wife I knew anything about. He always came by himself.

Q. Now did these people stay all year round, or just in the summer?

A. No, they would come in the summertime.

Q. So they were summer boarders?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did your family ever keep up with them after they went away? Or even after your mom didn't have a boardinghouse, did you all keep up with anybody?

A. I guess my mother and dad did. I don't know how they could not. In fact Aaron Green, in 1932, bought me my first bicycle. I will never forget that. He called me on the phone, and told me to come up to Sears and Roebuck, which was at that time was on Market Street. And he said to me "There's a bunch of bicycles here. Which one do you want?" And I thought he was joking at first, found out he was serious, found one I liked and got on it and he said "Go home." And I rode home on the bicycle like that.

Q. How old were you?

A. Twelve.

Q. And you knew how to ride a bike?

A. Oh yeah. You learn how to ride a bicycle when you are 8 years old.

Q. Other people's bikes?

A. Yeah.

Q. So what did he do? He must have had some kind of money.

A. He was apparently had a lot of money. He had a grocery business in Midland, Pennsylvania.

Q. Was he Jewish?

A. Yeah. Now some of his family moved into Asheville. Ben Kline. They were related. Now don't ask me how. They were from that neck of the woods too.

Q. So who came first—Aaron or Ben?

A. Aaron.

Q. And then Ben came…He married one of the Sheps, didn't he?

A. I think so, yeah.

Q. Well do you remember—was there a particular Jewish neighborhood in Asheville, when you were growing up?

A. Not really. Not in the 21`different houses we lived in. We lived in Linmar, at the top of the hill that was in l928—when Herbert Hoover was elected president, we bought an Atwater-Kent radio at that time. That was a big event as I think back, when I was 8 years old.

Q. Did they want Hoover to win, or they didn't want him?—your parents?

A. Oh I don't know. All I know is they got a big Atwater-Kent radio which is about three feet long and maybe 8 or 10 inches tall and a speaker about 2 feet in diameter. It was a big day in the house to have a radio.

Q. Did your mom keep Kosher?

A. No. She just—she was German, and German cooking was her specialty, I guess.

Q. So what were your family meals like?

A. They were big, they were big meals. Naturally, having guests in the house, she prepared real fancy big lunches and dinners. And my greatest pleasure was being able to not eat in the dining room, but eat in the kitchen, where you wouldn't have to be worrying about manners or anything else. I could get what I wanted to eat and eat as much as I wanted to.

Q. Did she expect you to eat out with the guests, or did she want you to—

A. Sometimes. Depending on how many she had there.

Q. How many would be a maximum, like what would be the most she would have?

A. Probably four. The Nesses—I'm trying to think—one of the Nesses—not the ones who lived here in Asheville, but it was a brother…

Q. Irving?

A. Could it have been Irving Ness?

Q. It was Irving—was the sister of Nettie Slossman—I mean Nettie Slossman was Irving's sister. And then there was Phil Ness.

A. Yeah. I think there was another one. This one was from New York.

Q. Was he stocky?

A. As I recall.

Q. Yeah, that's Irving I think. And then they later moved here.

A. Could have been. I remember he was very heavily involved in the stock market, had the 1929 crash.

Q. Maybe it was their father?

A. All I remember is his name is Ness. Something how in the back of my mind, I think he committed suicide after the Crash.

Q. Wasn't the one I am thinking of then…

A. I think there is another brother.

Q. Did he do that here in Asheville?

A. No, New York.

Q. So, what were conversations at the table about?

A. I don't remember; I was too young.

Q. When you were a child, who made the decisions in your family?

A. I would say my mother probably was the stronger of the two.

Q. What was your dad like?

A. Very nice, quiet man. Well-respected in the community. Well-liked in the community. And so was my mother, as far as that is concerned. He was struggling in the business, started out as the Asheville Candy Company, and grew from that into Asheville Showcase, because the people that bought the candy wanted a showcase to show their candy and so they started selling showcases; and then these places added food, and then they wanted china and then they wanted glass and they wanted silverware and so forth. And that's how it evolved into restaurant equipment.

Q. So, what was your father's name?

A. Leon.

Q. Are you a junior?

A. Yes.

Q. Where was that business, when he first started?

A. Started down at Southside, down at the Depot.

Q. Was it wholesale, or retail?

A. The candy was wholesale. He sold to drugstores, or places, candy. And he had the Shraft Agency here. He was friendly with uh, of course back in those days, there weren't that many Jewish families, and they were all real friendly.

Somehow, he was involved with dad's business, to start with, maybe backed him or something. I don't know.

Q. So when he had the showcases, was it down on Depot Street too?

A. Yes, they moved up to Lexington Avenue.

Q. What year was that?

A. I don't know.

Q. Were you a child then, or…

A. Oh yeah. And then they moved up on Broadway. '53 we started out in '53 on Broadway.

Q. What year was that? Were you a child then, or grown up when they moved to Broadway?

A. I was still a child. Because I was 15 when he died in '35.

Q. So when they moved to Broadway, your dad was still in it?

A. Oh yeah. And they—he died real sudden, and my mother had to take over the business. And I helped out with her in the business, after school. I changed my scheduling so I would get out of school at 12 o'clock—I was in high school at that time, at Lee-Edwards. And I would go and work, and work all afternoon, to help her out with the store. And she was the first lady in our industry, to be involved in the business.

Q. In the country?

A. In the country. It was strictly a man's business. And my brother's got some pictures of some of the early conventions we went to in the late '40's, and she was the only lady involved.

Q. How did she learn the business?

A. The hard way. Just jump in and take over. She had two young boys. I was 15 and Bill was 11.

Q. How many employees did she have?

A. Maybe one or two.

Q. So it wasn't like a whole staff?

A. Oh no. Back in those days, your business consisted of maybe one or two sales a day. That was probably a lot. My uncle came into the business—Mary's husband, Uncle Louie, Louie Gotley; and he was a salesman, he went out and sold.

Q. So he helped your mom?

A. Oh yeah. He came in the business, and he would travel the territory.

Q. What was the territory? How big was the territory?

A. About the same it is today—Western Carolina.

Q. Did he go into Tennessee?

A. No.

Q. Did he drive it?

A. Oh yeah, yeah.

Q. Now, when did they come to Asheville? They came before your father died?

A. Oh yeah. I would think they came, about the same, maybe after—the folks came here in 1920 and started the business, and I think they came shortly thereafter. Because he was in Greenville, South Carolina first. And he got caught by the Depression down there, and moved to Asheville.

Q. Was it possible that he was in Greenville even before your parents came to Asheville?

A. I don't know. It's possible, but I don't think so.

Q. What was the order—was your aunt older than your mother? Or was your mother older than your aunt?

A. I think Mary was older.

Q. I remember Mr. Gott, I remember Lou. He was very quiet when I would go to their apartment. Very tall and slim and very nice. He was the nicest man. But I actually didn't know that he traveled and sold. I wonder what it was like for him. Did you ever hear any stories from him, about him having difficulties with people in some of the towns he went to because he was Jewish or anything?

A. I don't think he had—he had a good sense of humor. And he got along quite well with the locals. They teased him a lot, and kidded with him a lot. I want to say, they wanted to do business with him and help him. And he talked with a pretty thick accent. And they were always pulling stunts on him. One day—he

smoked—and apparently when he threw the cigarette out the window, an ash flew back into the car—they didn't have air-conditioning back then—and it got into the cushion and started a fire. And he was at this restaurant in Silva. And they said "Louie, your car's on fire." And he said "Oh, go on—you are always pulling my leg." And they said "No, really, your car's on fire out there." And finally, they convinced him his car was burning and they rushed out with him and put the fire out. But they were always pulling tricks on him and kidding him and so forth.

Q. Well I wonder when he went to Silva if he went to see Saul.

A. I don't know if he went to see Saul or not. Actually, he didn't have any real reason—but I can't say whether he did or didn't.

Q. Well, did you know how your dad got money to start the business? Oh, you thought maybe Mr. Conn might have helped him.

A. He might have helped him.

Q. Was he a relative, Mr. Conn?

A. No.

Q. Did your father employ non-Jews? Or did just other Jewish people work in his business?

A. Wasn't nobody else—oh yeah, he had a black man, which was his truck-driver, did a lot of the work around there, cleaning up, etcetera, from stock up.

Q. Was he also the delivery man? Did he deliver and unload?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you remember his name?

A. He had one, Homer. What his last name was, I don't know. But Homer was working with my dad in the early '30's, and he taught me how to drive, on an old Essex that he had. And also he took me fishing down the Swanannoa River. I can remember that.

Q. Did you eat the fish, or throw them back?

A. These fish we didn't eat, 'cause when we got ready to—caught some little_____--when we got ready to leave—they were on a stick—and we got ready to leave and pulled them out, and there was a waterdog was eating on the fish. So I dropped the fish back into the river and ran. So no, we didn't eat those fish.

Q. How old were you then probably?

A. I was 11 or 12 years old. That's the first time I went fishing, that I can recall.

Q. Oh, that started—because you have a great love of fishing.

A. I've had a great love of fishing through the years.

Q. Now, Mark had told me you go all over all different seas to do deep sea fishing. But did you fish a lot in the rivers around here too?

A. Some. Used to fish in Beaver Lake quite a bit.

Q. What did you catch in Beaver Lake?

A. Bluegill.

Q. Did you eat those?

A. Oh yeah. Well, what I didn't eat, we sold.

Q. Where?

A. Oh different people.

Q. To the restaurants?

A. Oh no. To different people around the neighborhood. I'd sell them for 5 cents a fish. And Maury Gross, who was one of the old-timers, he said I use to bring the fish to his mother. She liked to fish. He said "Those stinking fish—you sold my mother those stinking fish for 5 cents a piece?!"

Q. Now, did she live in Beaver Lake?

A. They lived on Colonial Place. At that time we lived on Colonial. That was in Mt. Vernon Circle.

Q. Now did you live near Jack Bloomberg?

A. Jack lived up above us, really might say behind us up there on the next street up, on Colonial. A big brick house, that's where he lived.

Q. So you remember my cousin Lois?

A. Oh yes. Lois and V.C.

Q. Did you all play together as kids?

A. I don't know whether we did or not. I didn't play with girls back in those days.

Q. And Jules would have been younger I think?

A. We lived there, on Mt. Vernon Circle when my dad died.

Q. And so did you live in Beaver Lake after that?

A. Yep. On Lake Shore Drive. Twice we lived on Lake Shore Drive. Once in the early 30's or late 20's, and my mother bought a house—she bought this house, I was thinking, during WWII, somewhere in there. That house, that's when I was in college at the time.

Q. Now, what college did you go to?

A. Georgia Tech.

Q. Why did you want to go there?

A. Engineering. Number 1. Number 2, it was cooler. I don't know if you are familiar with co-op, but you would go to school 6 weeks and then you would go out to work 6 weeks. And I did that co-op, maybe 2 years. And why did that change? (thinking) That was a 5-year course; and for some reason I decided I wasn't going to do right, I was going to go back into the business. So I figured I might as well get through in 4 years rather than 5 years. So I transferred over to a regular, and had to go to a summer school here in Asheville at Asheville Normal teachers. Had to take some summer courses to get some more credits, so I'd be eligible to graduate in 4 years instead of 5.

Q. Did you change to business?

A. No, stayed with mechanical.

Q. Where was the Asheville Normals Academy?

A. It was up on the hill where is now Missions Hospital.

Q. Do you remember why you were going to go into the business? Did your family expect you to go into the business?

A. No, but I think my mother needed help. And instead of going to work—I was suppose to go to work at Inca and different places like that where they were putting their engineering students in education and practical education as well as—I decided she needed help in the business, and I decided no sense in me wasting time going to these plants when I was going to be working there. So when my 6 weeks would come for work, I would help at the store. And after that I said "This is ridiculous. I might as well change, and save a year."

Q. So save a year of your time, and the store's too.

A. And of course, then I never got into the store anymore, 'cause the war started. Although, I signed up for commission, they were offering students that graduated commissions in the Navy. And so I signed up to become an ensign in the Navy.

Q. What year was that?

A. 1941.

Q. And where did they send you?

A. Sent me first to Cornell. I was up there 6 weeks training. It was in July, '41. And, more than that. I spent 3 months. I got out in September from there. And was sent to Boston, for training there. And then WWII started. It may have been 4 months at Cornell.

Q. But then where did you go in the war? You were on a ship, right?

A. Well, no, I never was on a ship, as far as active duty. I was on a boat, not a ship, training, when WWII, I was on a mine-sweeper in Boston, south Boston, the navy yard. And I was being trained there for mine-sweeping duty, when the war broke out. But after that I got switched over to inspector of the machinery division of the Navy. And they sent me to Cleveland to a diesel school there. And I was in Cleveland and became a superintendent of a school there. I was there for a couple of years.

Q. Was that probably because of your engineering background?

A. Yes. Had the engineering at Cornell, more engineering. So I guess they saw, "O.K.—mechanical engineer—we'll put you in this school." And so I had that school and then I had another school after that in St. Louis. That was diesel also. And then I had a diesel school in Beloit, Wisconsin. And, finally, they sent me over to Guam, in charge of the machinery on a base in Guam. Heavy machinery. And then finally, I guess I had enough points to get out and I said "I don't want

this man's Navy. Good bye." And so they sent me back home. I never basically, served duty on a ship.

Q. Yeah. 'Cause you were in charge of their equipment on the ground, that went out. How long were you in?

A. Five years. The certificate says…can't read it.

Q. That's a long time. Maybe we can take a picture of it. Back up just a little bit, some of the Asheville stuff. You said during WWII your mom bought a house on Lakeshore Drive. Was that probably the first house she ever bought?

A. Yes.

Q. And did she continue to live there for most of her life?

A. Well, no. I'm trying to think. She lived there—Bill got married while living there. Then I moved out and had my own apartment. At Edgewood Knoll. And then she moved into the apartments, let's see, at Graceland Garden, when they were built. And there she lived until she passed away.

I don't remember how many years that was.

Q. But that was sort of the only house she ever owned?

A. Right.

Q. And did you live in that house?

A. I lived in that house when the war was over, for a year or two years, until I decided I wanted my own place and moved out.

Q. O.K. This is going back a little bit to your dad, and maybe your mom: Do you remember if your dad belonged to any civic organizations, like Elks or Kiwanis or Shriner?

A. Yes. He was a Shriner.

Q. Was your mother involved with any civic organizations?

A. None that I can—she was involved in her younger days with the Calvary, here in Asheville.

Q. I don't know what that is.

A. I'm not so sure that I know too much about it. But there was a Calvary unit here in Asheville, and they were, had horses down here on Riverside Drive, where there was an antique furniture barn, just beyond the Silverman.

Q. Was it Johnny Penlon's? No, no, on Riverside.

A. Know where Jerry Silverman?—just up the street there on the left-hand side, a _____--

Q. An antique place.

A. Yeah, well there use to be a Calvary. Now I'm going back, when I was a baby or real young in my formative years, I remember she and I don't know who else, would go there and ride with this Calvary unit. The horses would go up to Beaucatcher Mountain up there, and their favorite drive was to ride to Mount Meadow's End.

Q. Where was that?

A. Up about 7 miles beyond Beaucatcher Mountain.

Q. Up the mountain and you just kept going?

A. Yeah. Like going toward Mt. Mitchell. There was a big inn on the left-hand side up there, a regular inn where tourists stayed. Of course now it's on the parkway. That was before the parkway was built. I can recall—

Q. Going in a car? Not on a horse?

A. Not me. But I remember she used to have these leather leggings that uh—

Q. Leather britches? Riding pants?

A. Riding britches. And these leather—I don't know what you call them—but I remember playing with them as a kid. I put them on myself there.

Q. So the Calvary was just women or men and women?

A. Men and women.

Q. Do you think they were just a club, or some kind of defense—

A. I think more of a club to ride the horses and give them exercises. I don't think she was part of the Calvary. I think she was an auxiliary, maybe, or something like that.

Q. So she was a horse-woman? I wonder if she had horses in Germany… There's a lot of people we can ask about that. Someone will know about. Helen will probably know. That's real interesting. So did your family have any experience

with anti-semitism in Asheville? Do you remember it as a child, or remember your parents saying anything?

A. No.

Q. Where did you go to grade school?

A. Claxton. Started out in grade school in Claxton. And David Miller, and Lee Edwards.

Q. And did you have very many friends who were not Jewish?

A. Oh yeah. I was very active in scouting.

Q. What troop?

A. Troop 11.

Q. Where did they meet?

A. Trinity Episcopal on Church Street, and we had our little click there; and then of course in school you had your clicks that you were friendly with.

Q. Who were some of your friends in scouts, and did you remain friends with them for a long time?

A. Yes, different ones. I heard you mention Leonard. He was one of the camp directors at one time, when I was at Boy Scout camp.

Q. At Seven Rims Creek? Where was the Boy Scout camp?

A. Dent Creek.

Q. I think he was in Troop 8 though.

A. Yeah, Troop 8. Right. And Joe Lishinfelds. He was also counselor at the same time. We had all during 1932 'til I guess I got out in '37 or something like that.

Q. Was Aaron Chandler a part of that scout thing too?

A. Yeah. He was Troop 8 too I believe.

Q. Were there any other Jewish kids in 11?

A. I don't recall. Wasn't many Jewish boys around there. Now when you had AZA—They formed a AZA chapter there—there wasn't that many boys around.

Q. Were you in it? AZA?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. Who else was in it? Do you remember?

A. Oh gosh. Norman Salton. All the Chandlers. Your dad. Can't remember any more.

Q. Where did it meet—the AZA?

A. At the Center.

Q. But was that the one in Montford?

A. I think it was on Chandler Street.

Q. Michael Robinson told us about there was a building in Montford before the JCC was built that the Temple used for meetings and all that stuff.

A. Well now Sunday school, used to have Sunday school on Montford and then on Cumberland and Chestnut street there. It may have been JCC also set up on the corner there on the high bank there.

Q. A big stone house. Is it still there?

A. Yeah. And Mrs. Ed Milishenfelds, she ran the Sunday school on Montford at that time.

Q. Where on Montford was that?

A. I don't remember exactly where it was. Around the corner from Chestnut Street down maybe a block or half a block on the right-hand side there.

Q. Going north from Chestnut or south from Chestnut?

A. Going north. It'd be on the right, west—east side. One of the big houses there.

Q. Well, how would you describe the religious life of your family, growing up? Were they observant or less observant, reformed or conservative?

A. Reformed. Very reformed.

Q. What kind of Jewish education did you get?

A. Not much.

Q. Did you learn Hebrew?

A. No.

Q. Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?

A. No. Confirmation.

Q. Do you remember who was in your confirmation class with you?

A. Yeah. Let's see—Phyllis Salton, two boys—Henry Gallenbeck and his cousin. He and I were the two only boys in that class. All the rest were girls. Beckinson's niece—what was her name? I can't remember that.

Q. So did you all go to Friday night services?

A. Occasionally.

Q. Do you remember the service? Was it in mostly English or any in Hebrew?

A. Mostly English.

Q. Was it the old prayer book that we had for many years, the union prayer book?

A. Right. And of course that was in the Temple over on Spruce Street.

Q. Spruce, near Woodbin?

A. Right.

Q. Do you remember—were there different Rabbis at the Temple?

A. No we didn't have too much of a turnover. Rabbi Jacobson, he was there until they came and married us.

Q. And then was there a Rabbi between him and Rabbi Unger?

A. I can't remember. May have been.

Q. Because that was when you were in the Navy?

A. Yes.

Q. What was the function of the Synagogue in the JCC? Were you super-active or not very active?

A. I took the atminson when I was in the AZA; and of course our big deal here was the summer camp that we had every year. Which brought boys in from all over the district. District 5 I think it was. And that was our big activity—I guess it was a week camp we had. Different camps around.

Q. So it was at all different camps, not just one camp?

A. No, we went to different camps, why I don't know. Wouldn't take us back, or whatever. (laughter) Of course the big highlight was the dance at the end of the week and of course the Asheville girls were real popular around that time.

Q. Well, a couple hundred boys—there weren't a couple hundred girls.

A. We didn't have a couple hundred—I don't know how many we had. Your dad probably could tell you more. He's what, 2 years older than I am?

Q. He's 4 years older than you.

A. 'Cause I was what?—14, 15, 16.

Q. Do you remember which camps it was at? Were they Jewish camps or not Jewish camps?

A. No, they weren't Jewish camps. In fact, I don't think Blue Star was even here.

Q. Blue Star wasn't here, but there was Osceola was there I think, in Hendersonville I think.

A. No, Osceola is new, relatively new, it was after WWII.

Q. Well were the camps in Hendersonville or in Asheville?

A. In Brevard.

Q. Oh, in Brevard. The AZA camps were in Brevard?

A. Yeah. I remember going to an AZA convention in California.

Q. Wow.

A. Norman was a delegate. I think Marshal Penske, Jr. was a delegate. And I may have—I guess I was a delegate. I was fifteen years old at the time. And the three of us drove out to California.

Q. How long did that take? (laughter) Wow. That was a big adventure.

A. Very big.

Q. Where in California was it?

A. Pacific Palisades.

Q. Wow.

A. It was right above the cliffs there, there was a camp. And there was a number of boys from Atlanta and Charleston. And it seems to me that we brought one of them back. Morris had a Chevrolet or Ford that had a rumble seat. And one of us had to ride on the rumble seat, which wasn't too bad except when we got in the Rockies it got a little bit cold.

Q. Wow. So was that really fun?

A. Oh yeah. Yeah. A lot of fun.

Q. But you must have already known some of the delegates there who were from District 5.

A. Yeah. We knew a lot of the guys. It was a good time.

Q. That sounds like a great time.

A. It reminds me of another trip. I don't think I had any pictures from that. In 1935 I think it was, I—summer of '35—L.P. Miller, from Biltmore's School, decided to take 40 boys on a trip to California for 6 weeks. That was going to cost us $25 a person, and that included everything. And that was an experience of a lifetime, to say the least. And I convinced my dad to let me go, and he put up the $25; and we were gone 40 days and we had 40 boys in that bus, an old school bus. And that was also highly an experience.

Q. Do you remember who else went on it? Did you have really good friends that went with you?

A. Well I had a couple, from the neighborhood. Bennett Clark, and his brother Wayne, that lived on Mt. Vernon Circle there. And then he had a cousin, Durwood Johnson, he went. And I think those were the only ones I knew before—of course by the time we got back we were well-acquainted with everybody. But, there was a bunch from north Asheville, and could have been from Biltmore School, where he taught school. And we had all kinds of experiences on that trip.

Q. What was the purpose of it? Was it like going to camp, or to learn a specific thing, or—

A. Sight-seeing. We were gonna tour the country. It was a tour. We camped out. Needless to say, for $25 that includes meals, we cooked our meals at camp stoves, and, or supposedly cooked them…(laughter) And then most of the time we had cold food and sandwiches and you name it. But we went to the World's Fair in San Diego, and then we went all the way up—well we went through Carlsbad Caverns, in Texas. And the Grand Canyon, and San Diego and the World's Fair, and up to San Francisco; and then we came back, across the country.

Q. Did you go to Chicago?

A. No. We came to St. Louis. And one of the things that really struck us funny—I was 15, and all of us was 15, 14, a couple maybe 13, some of them 16—but we were in a section of St. Louis whereby the—in the red light district, or close to it. And we would walk down the streets, and the girls would try to coax us into their houses there. We thought that was the funniest thing we had ever seen or heard.

Q. Did L. P. Miller warn you about that?

A. I don't think so. I don't know how we got in that section of St. Louis, but we were there.

Q. So did you camp out most of the time?

A. All the time.

Q. I guess your Boy Scout training came in handy?

A. Oh yeah. We'd find a vacant field in the city. And we took tents so that we could pitch our tents for night-time camping. We pitched them one night, the first night out of Asheville, was the only time we pitched a tent. After that, when we'd get ready, we'd just flop on the ground.

Q. You were so tired?

A. Yeah.

Q. Too much trouble to do the tents. We're out of tape here. Do you need to get a drink or take a break?

Disk 2: Rocamora

A. {when the recording started, talking was already going on} …I said tell somebody about it, and they said you are not telling everything. I said "Yes I am."

Q. Well this was the Depression, wasn't it?

A. Yeah, well, it was l936, coming out of it.

Q. Recovering. And you were camping out, and you were cooking all your own food, so…

A. Well just the gas for the bus. What he did, he rented a truck chassis from Richberg Motors. He was a Ford dealer. And the school board gave him an old bus body that we put on the chassis; and we had to modify it, put a lot of benches or actually the benches were planks. And we put seats down each side and then

put a double row in the middle. And we sat in there, if you were on the middle, your person sitting over there, their knees would go in here; and the person sitting over there, their knees would go in here, and then—

Q. You were sort of like you were in steerage! (laughter)

A. Yeah, well you were like accordion-shaped with your feet in there. But we got in there, and I think one of the interesting stories about that started out we were supposed to leave at 6 o'clock on I think a Monday morning; and we are meeting at L.P. Miller's house over—he lived over on Clayton Street. And of course we worked for weeks fixing that bus up, ways to put the gear, put racks up on the roof and benches inside and everything. And so we are there 6 o'clock in the morning, all these boys had khaki shorts, khaki shirt, and these white pith hats. (laughter) That was our uniform.

Q. Were you called something? A troop of something—you had uniforms, but you had no titles?

A. No. And uh, 6'clock—no bus. 7'oclock—no bus. 8 o'clock—no bus.

Q. And you were at his house?

A. Yeah. And there must have been maybe 15 or 20 of us.

Q. And were you waiting for Mr. Miller?

A. Well, the bus had gone to Biltmore, to pick up the guys at Biltmore. So—

Q. But was Mr. Miller driving?

A. Oh we had a driver, in fact we had two drivers. And uh, we waited, and finally about 9 o'clock, the news got back to us, the bus broke down coming up Biltmore Avenue, and had to be towed into Richberg Motor, and was being fixed. That what had happened was it burnt out the clutch, coming up Biltmore Avenue with the boys that it had on there. So, all of us that were at Miller's house went down to Richberg Motors, walked down to Cox Avenue over here where they were. And we hung around those guys, those mechanics while they were trying to fix that bus up for us. And finally, must have been 6 o'clock at night, they finally got through with that new clutch.

And the question was, should we leave now, or wait until 6 o'clock in the morning. Took a vote, and of course it was unanimous: "Let's go now!"

(laughter)

Q. Nobody wanted to go home again.

A. We got as far as Hot Springs, and there is a campground there, and by the river, we pulled up there, unpacked the bus, took our tents out and pitched all these pup tents around there. And that was the only time we pitched tents the whole trip. (laughter) After that, never again did we pitch tents.

Q. So there were 40 boys.

A. 40 boys, plus the three leaders.

Q. Two bus drivers and

A. And L.P.

Q. Now what did he teach?

A. I don't know.

Q. You don't even know? Did he ever do it again?

A. He did it twice after that. And he lost his shirt every time. The next year he charged $50. And he lost his shirt. And the next year he charged either $75 or $100, and he lost his shirt on the trip; and no more. At that time, if you toured a state, you had to head out west. You had to have a bus permit to go through the state. And we were in Arizona, and they arrested Mr. Miller, because he didn't have a tour permit. And he had to go to court the next day, and testify. And L.P. said he didn't know he had to have a permit to tour the state, number 1; and he was only charging us—the boys only paid $25 for the trip. And the judge—a bunch of us boys were in the courtroom, the judge says, "Is that right?—you only paid him $25?" And we said "Yes sir, that's all he charged us--$25 each one of us." And so he told the clerk or whoever it was "Get them complimentary passes to tour Arizona as much as they want to, and to do that, you shouldn't have to pay to tour the state."

Q. Do you think that—I wonder if news of that got published in the Asheville paper, about the trip? About what happened?

A. Bob Terrell wrote an article on it, oh I guess 5 or 10 years ago, talking about the trip.

Q. Did he interview you for it?

A. No. He had a list of the—I think it was in reference to L.P. Miller, because he became a principal of Biltmore School, and I think he retired, and it was in conjunction with that that he had written this article.

Q. I wonder if at the time that it was in the newspaper—that you all were going, or that L.P.Miller got arrested and had to go to court, or…

A. There may have been an article or a picture taken of us leaving. I don't know. Because we left.

Q. Because now if they did it, the whole trip would be on the Internet minute by minute, you know.

A. Yeah, somebody would have a laptop, sending the information back.

Q. With video, and everything.

A. And another time, we got arrested, we were, I think, in Denver, late at night and we found a vacant lot. And we pulled up and unloaded and we were camping out. And we posted guards; we had two fellas watching out 2 hours or whatever it was. And the police came by, and wanted to know what we were doing there. And we said, well just camping and touring and so forth. I don't think I was involved in that, but one of them had L.P.'s gold watch. And the police searched

them and found the watch, and said he wanted to know where he had stole it. And he said "Didn't steal it." So had to get L.P. up, and the cops gave us a rough, hard time.

Q. Quite a learning adventure.

A. Oh yeah. It was a learning.

Q. How many times in Asheville did you get stopped by the police? Probably never.

A. Well, I wouldn't say that.

Q. You were near the red light district, you had to go to court in Arizona, the police were bothering you in Denver—doesn't sound like it was the lap of luxury…

A. One of the guys caught malaria, in Arizona—no Arkansas. Boy the mosquitoes, they were rough. And he got sick, and I think we were in St. Louis and had to ship him back by train. I think that's why we were down by the railroad station, near the red light district, in St. Louis. And had all these propositions. And put him on the train, and send him back to _____.

Q. Poor kid.

A. I don't know who it was.

Q. Um. Wow. That doesn't have anything to do with any of the questions I have on here. Let's get back to—

A. It's part of growing up.

Q. I love those great stories though. O.K. Do you remember the old Temple? And do you remember the circumstances leading to the construction of the new Temple?

A. Yeah, I was on the board for the new Temple. Gerald Davis was in charge of that. I was a substitute teacher one time I think at the old Temple. And I said never again would I try to be a teacher in the Sunday school. Those kids were unbelievable and unruly, couldn't control them for hell or high water.

Q. Continued down into our generation. Well, when you were growing up, do you remember anything about the Leo Frank case? Did anybody talk to you about that? Did you know who Leo Frank was?—the guy in Atlanta who got lynched for murdering a young girl? That was before you were born, but—

A. There wasn't that much story about the silver shirts in Biltmore, where they were printing the paper here. I don't remember. See, I was in college at the time. And I didn't see or know too much about what—

Q. What year did you go to college?

A. '37 to '41.

Q. Did you ever remember any Ku Klux Klan incidents, or seeing them or anything?

A. I think I seen some pictures of it in the Atlanta paper. And such.

Q. How did the Depression affect your family? Did it affect your family in the business?

A. Oh yeah, that's why my mother took in boarders. Like I say, she had a hat shop, dresses. She made dresses, and Dora Lynn had hats. Seemed to me that the two would make them side by side.

Q. In the same building, next to each other?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did you work, like as a little kid? Did you sell papers, or what did you do for—

A. I was always doing something to raise money. Sold _____, Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, had regular routes on that.

Q. What was your route on that? I know my dad's route on that.

A. My route was—well I lived across from the Temple then, so I had all around Liberty Street, Chestnut Street, and then also downtown, I worked the Flatiron building, I worked the old arcade building back then.

Q. The hotels?

A. No. And then before that—

Q. Where did you get those magazines? All the boys went one place where they came out.

A. Newspaper, news distributor, magazine people. Then you knew when the Saturday Evening Post came out, you knew when he'd be down there.

Q. What street was it on?

A. It was one, I think back in Carolina Lane, back behind a store there. There was one there. And I use to cut grass in the neighborhood, shovel snow in the wintertime, and clear the sidewalks. Get 25 cents to cut a lawn. Now today they get $45.

Q. That's inflation for you.

A. One of the stories I keep telling Leo Finkelstein's mother—

Q. Finkie. Was she good friends with your mother?

A. Yeah. She was part of—they had a poker group.

Q. Yeah, talk about that a little bit.

A. They played poker. S.I. played in there. S.I.'s wife.

Q. Hannah.

A. Hannah, and Murray and Eva. Who else?

Q. Dora?

A. I think Carrie Bloomberg was in there. Maybe Dora might have been in there. I think they played maybe twice a week.

Q. Where did they play?

A. Different houses.

Q. Sunday and Wednesdays?

A. And Wednesdays. Finkie wanted—they'd pick blackberries, lived up there on Mt. Vernon Circle, up behind on that knoll behind—

Q. Now where did she live?

A. She lived down at the bottom of the hill there. Max Crone lived on one side.

Q. So that sort of was a Jewish neighborhood?

A. Well, there was a Jewish neighborhood—there was probably half a dozen families there. Murray Gross lived on Colonial, Tippie Gallenbeck lived there, Mort Konn lived up there. But uh, Finkie wanted some blackberries, to make wine a dessert—I don't know. I picked them on Saturday. Picked a gallon. And she didn't want me to bring them until Monday. So by Monday, the blackberries had settled down to the point they weren't a gallon anymore, they were about 3 quarts. And I took them to her and she said "Well that's not a gallon. I want the whole gallon." So I had to go out and pick another quart of blackberries. I was mad. I think I sold them to her for 25 or 50 cents. For all those blackberries.

Q. Did she make wine with it?

A. I don't know. I think she did. I don't think she wanted blackberries for cobbler.

Q. Funny.

A. And I did that, and then of course the Crash came in 1929, and the monies I had made doing all these different things, I lost it, because I had it in the Central Bank. I lost I think $28, and oh, I was a sick cookie.

Q. Never got that back. So why is there a picture back there of Roosevelt going through?

A. He was here in Asheville. And um, I was in the boy scouts at the time, and an honor guard then, and told to be down there for the honor guard for Roosevelt.

Q. Down where?

A. That was at McCormick Place.

Q. McCormick Field?

A. McCormick Field, yeah.

Q. So did you meet him?

A. Shook hands with him.

Q. Oh you did?

A. Yeah. There's a picture. And that's my brother on the left and me on the right. You can see how much hair he had.

Q. Yeah, he did, didn't he? Not any more.

A. And there's a picture of my mother, and she got to be a "life master".

Q. Can we make the camera go there. We'll get it later. So how did this affect your family?—the rise of Hitler—what did that mean to your family?

A. It affected my mother, because—I don't know how many of her sisters and brothers were still in Germany. Aunt Racie--when Dot and I were on our honeymoon, in '54, we met one of her sisters who still lived in Hamburg. She had gone through it all. And Aunt Racie she brought over here after the war. She brought one of her brothers over here, and some of them had got into England.

Q. Before, or after the war?

A. I wouldn't swear which it was.

Q. But none of them came to live in Asheville?

A. Aunt Racie did.

Q. For the rest of her life?

A. She came—I don't know how many years she was here. I think she left to go live with one of her daughters.

Q. But she didn't raise a family here? She already had a family.

A. But my mother brought I don't know how many of her family over to this country.

Q. So she would have been the sponsor to bring them over. But didn't they have to assure jobs for people who came over?

A. I guess they did whatever they had to do.

Q. And money. She would have had to put up money too.

A. I don't know if she put up money or what. She had a couple of friends, one was a judge that she played bridge with. I think helped her get her brothers and sisters.

Q. How about the founding of Israel—did that have any impact on your family?

A. No.

Q. Now how about any local institutions that had Jewish quotas or Jewish restrictions?

A. Country clubs, number one. And there were some other clubs, they had there—one was at the Battery Park Hotel. I forget what the name of it was, it was a business--

Q. A downtown club?

A. Yeah, a downtown club. I tried to get in there, but couldn't get in. I think Harry Haddock belonged to that downtown club. And my dad was a member of the Asheville Country Club, back in the early '30's. They needed members and they took in anybody.

Q. The Depression.

A. Whoever could afford to pay the dues. This had to be the '20's. I use to swim up there.

Q. When you were swimming up there, was anybody ever mean to you because you were Jewish?

A. No.

Q. Who were some of the other Jewish families that joined?—do you remember?

A. Max Krome was a member. And I think Kome Zagiers was a member. The Dave's were a member.

Q. Were the Krumlin's?

A. I don't think so. My dad dropped his membership with that. The Depression finally caught him. This was '27, '28, somewhere along in there.

Q. So, how do you think the Jewish community changed over the years and how has it remained the same? Or has it remained the same?

A. Well it seems, it's changed, particularly with the JCC activities that's going on there. It's done a lot to bring Jewish life to the foreground in the community. And of course with what Bratner has done with the Temple and that, within the community. It has changed.

Q. For the better? Worse?

A. Oh, definitely better. And it still, I am sure there is just as much anti-semitism today as there was then. I don't think it is any less. More.

Q. So you must think, because you haven't really mentioned much about anti-semitism when I've tried to ask about growing up or anything, so do you feel that it is kind of under the surface? It's not very obvious?

A. I think it mostly underneath, rather than, well, I've knew.

Q. But now all the places that use to not allow Jews, allow them. Like the country clubs, even the Biltmore Country Club allows Jews. The Junior League, and the organizations, they all allow Jews. But you feel there is still some anti-semitism?

A. Oh yeah. The fact that they allow them as members doesn't mean that they don't have anti-semitic feelings.

Q. So does that sort of bother you or you don't let it get to you, I guess?

A. I don't let it bother me. I try to ignore it. It's like Sam Robinson—he was very adamant about invocations that's given when they mention Jesus Christ. He would stand up and say "I don't like it. It's not necessary." He'd make an issue out of it. Most of us would sit back and say this is pure ignorance on the most part. That's the way they are brought up; that's the way they are taught. And these religious leaders, that's the way they are going to give an invocation. And they do it, you might say, out of force of habit. So why make a point out of it. But he wasn't going to take it. And he let a lot of people know about it.

Q. Do you think that it made a difference that he did?

A. It did make a difference in a lot of cases. And I am sure, it was called to their attention, that they were willing to change, particularly clergy. Most of the clergy.

Q. Well, speaking of that, do you remember the radio program Rabbi Unger use to have? Was that program sort of geared more towards the community to explain Judaism?

A. Right.

Q. Do you think Rabbi Unger was a catalyst for change?

A. I think so. I think that his program did a lot to change people. Now some of them you aren't going to change, I don't care what you do. But I think it helped a lot of people thought a lot of that program and listened to it regularly.

Q. People who weren't Jewish?

A. Right.

Q. It was on Friday afternoons?

A. Or was it Sunday morning.

Q. Probably not Sunday mornings—people would be in church. Maybe Sunday evening?

A. Seemed to me on Friday about 5 o'clock. You ought to remember.

Q. I don't remember. He had a busy Friday I guess.

A. His sermons always lasted 20 minutes.

Q. Oh I thought they lasted 45 minutes. They were very long. How did you meet your wife?

A. Leroy Gross married a girl from Newberry, and the wedding was in Augusta. And we were invited to it and I had a blind date with her down in Augusta.

Q. So was she from Augusta?

A. No, she lived in Augusta.

Q. And what was her maiden name?

A. Shmerling. They had a jewelry store there.

Q. So all the people were jewelers who were at this wedding?! What was Leroy's wife's name? I remember her.

A. Zagotski, June.

Q. And she was from Newberry, South Carolina?

A. Her folks had a department store.

Q. What year was the wedding that you met your wife?

A. '49. '48 or '49. Because I dated her about 4 years.

Q. How did you manage that, because that is pretty far away. Did you drive a lot?

A. I went down weekends. Friday nights. Usually go down Saturday and then Saturday night and Sunday and then come back Sunday night.

Q. So, did she—were there a lot of Jewish people in Augusta?

A. Yeah, Augusta is loaded.

Q. More than Asheville?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. At the time? Well I guess 'cause it was on the coast, and there was such a huge—

A. No, they are not on the coast.

Q. It's not too far from Savannah, like an hour from Savannah? But Jews have been in Savannah for a very long time. That's what I meant; it was closer to the coast, so the settlement always happened from the coast inward. So we are in the mountains, so we were further away. Well, what year did you get married?

A. '54 I believe it was.

Q. How old are your kids now and where do they live?

A. Larry is 46 and lives in Durham. And Hermione is 48 and lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

Q. And where did they go to college?

A. Carolina. And Lonnie got his law degree in California.

Q. So was their Jewish upbringing pretty similar to yours?

A. Yeah. They fought Sunday school tooth and nail. Not only that, we wanted to go the lake on Sundays, Saturdays, and there was a problem.

Q. What lake did you go to?

A. Lake James.

Q. Did you have a little house there?

A. A houseboat.

Q. Oh yeah. Do you still have it?

A. Got rid of it when they went off to school.

Q. Are they very involved in Judaism?

A. Hermione, no. Larry, yes. Larry was past president there of their Temple; he was president when they had a drive and built a new temple down there. And his wife, who was a convertee, she is a lay cantor; she taught Sunday school for about 10 years, very active in the community in every way.

Q. Do they have kids?

A. They have a couple of kids, 9 and 11. Adoptees.

Q. Are they from America?

A. Yeah.

Q. So you are going to have a Bar Mitzvah coming up pretty soon.

A. Yeah, in a couple of years.

Q. So, almost through. Going back to your family's business. Across the years, you have talked a little bit about the kind of customers your dad had when it was a candy business, and then it kind of changed to be a showcase and restaurant. But who was the customers? What kind of people were the customers? Just talk about over the years if your customer bases changed.

A. Oh yeah. Changed tremendously. Today the restaurant business is controlled basically by chance, which we do not get into that business except for emergency, on Saturday afternoon they find out all the sudden they are short on glasses, and they will run over here on Saturday morning and buy some glasses 'cause they need 'em Saturday night. Or their delivery didn't come in from their supplier on

time. And today, well, I just so happen to have a copy of a letter I wrote back in May of last year. Saying that—I'll read this—"it seems to me that each year the dealers and suppliers are drifting farther and farther apart, to the point that most manufacturers don't care about the dealer and only tolerate us for lack of a better way to go to market. Suppliers nowadays go to market in the following ways, thereby bypassing the traditional dealer. And a list here, nine different outlets that have sprung up in the last ten or twenty years—competitors of ours, so to speak. And making it doubly tough to do business today, compared to what it use to be. We use the expression "There's no such thing as loyalty anymore." Use to have a customer, they were loyal to you; want to do business with you and you responded accordingly, and you were willing to work with them. But today, loyalty doesn't exist, either from the standpoint of a customer, or from a manufacturer. I maintain that if Leon Rocamora dropped dead in front of a manufacturer today, they would just step over me and just go on about their business. They don't care. Ninety-nine percent of the manufacturers only interested in one thing: money: volume.

Q. Well, um, so when did they start to change?

A. With the advent of the chain. McDonalds.

Q. So that's been 20—maybe 40 years? And been getting progressively worse.

A. McDonalds was the first chain-based and after that, well look around Asheville—what are your bigger better restaurants?—they're all chains.

Q. Yeah, but there's a lot of independent restaurants, especially downtown.

A. Yeah, but then there's all these different outlets.

Q. What are some of the different outlets?

A. Well, start with the grocery-house, Cisco. They sell everything we sell.

Q. They use to be restaurant suppliers.

A. And the Internet. That takes a lot of it. Then they got catalog houses that send out catalogs with cheap prices. Then you got the factories that sell direct. Re-stocking reps, that are distributors, that sell anybody and everybody. So, I've got nine of them here.

Q. So you are just saying that any independent restaurant person has many ways that they can get equipment now?

A. And unfortunately, price is the determining factor in most cases.

Q. As opposed to in the past, if it wasn't price it was, what?

A. Business relationship, loyalty. If you were their supplier and they needed something, they would call you and say "I need a range or some glasses. Send them over. When can I get them? I'll be over in 30 minutes to pick them up." Today it's "What is your price on this range?"

Q. And that's it.

A. And I'll let you know. And then they get on the Internet or wherever, in a catalog or wherever they can find it. I had a case, Country Club in Waynesville.

This is fairly recent. They needed an ice machine. Gave them a price on the ice machine, and they wanted to know when they could get it. Said we'll get it over there tomorrow morning. "Well, how about the old machine?" "Well, if you want, we'll take it to the dump for you, as such." Wanted it delivered, and so we had the price of the ice machine and to deliver it on our truck, priced to take their old ice machine to the dump; and he said "O.K. Send it over." Couple hours later he calls up and said "I got on the Internet, and I found out I can buy that ice machine for $25 less. But they are not going to charge me freight, not going to charge me to deliver it, (well you know that old ice machine, they aren't going to take), and they aren't going to charge me sales tax. Now if you want to meet those prices, you can do it. I said "Thanks but no thanks. Goodbye." This is the whole world today. And I don't know what percent of my merchandise, today is imported. Competition. People say 'Well, why don't you support the local manufacturers, made in this country?' I said "I'd love to. But you aren't going to pay the price. You want everything cheap as you can get it." And so consequently, we have to go with the cheapest prices, because that is what the public wants. Everything today on the television is price, price, price. Newspaper: price, price, price. Radio: price, price, price. Everything is strictly price. People don't care whether it's made in China—in this country or China or the Philippines or wherever. They

do if they lose their job to one of these countries. Then they are unhappy. But, for the most part, 99% of them, they only want price.

Q. So what keeps you in business then? How are you adjusting so you can compete?

A. Well, we buy from out of the country. Buy from importers, more and more. Most all of your flatware is made in China or the Philippines. High percentage of the china, glassware, is still made in this country. Now why the others haven't brought it in cheaper, I don't know. But maybe the cost of labor is not that big of percentage in the cost of the product. We buy refrigerators now, made in China. About five or six of them sitting on the floor there.

Q. And they are cheaper, even with the freight, to buy them from there, than here?

A. And considerably cheaper. And better.

Q. They are better?

A. When I say better, they have more features, which make them a better product. And it's getting worse every day. Absolutely, every day it gets worse.

Q. So in the older days, before this chain thing started happening, who would your customers be?

A. Oh, everybody. Every restaurant.

Q. Now in Asheville, almost all the restaurants were owned by Greek people, right?

A. Well the high percentage were, yeah. And they were all good customers. But today, with the new generation, the Greeks—not saying it because they are Greeks—but they buy from the catalogs and from the food houses and from Iler City, where they get a price, better price.

Q. There's not as many Greek restaurant owners either.

A. Steve who runs Asiana Buffet, they are opening a new place out on—

And I was talking to his brother—Steve said I needed to talk to him. And I said "I want to talk to you about some of your equipment." And he said "I don't know. The Cisco, they are going to give us a dishwasher, units. And the Pepsi Cola people are going to give us all our ice machines. The –some other groceries are giving us fryers.

Q. Literally giving them?

A. Giving them. Well they want the business. So they are willing to give them four or five thousand dollars worth of equipment to secure that business, because it more or less assures that they have got an outlet there. I said well, we'll be out to see you—he's going out of town this week—I said there's bound to be some other things you will need.' He said 'O.K., come on out.' But, they don't care. All they want is a price, everything is a price. It's unmerciful.

Q. So did you have expectations that either of your children would come into the business?

A. No, not only that. I wouldn't have wanted 'em.

Q. Wouldn't have wanted them to work with you, or—

A. I wouldn't want them in this business.

Q. But you went into your parents' business.

A. Well, I did it because—not because they wanted me to—but, see again, conditions were different then. But like my Larry, when he was 13 years old, he came down here and worked with me one summer. At the end of the summer, he said "Dad, I don't know how you put up with this, with your customers in this business." He said "I couldn't put up with that." Thirteen years old, he said "I don't want no part of your business."

Q. What were they doing that he thought was wrong?

A. I don't know what all turned him off. But he said I wouldn't put up with—picky. If something is not exactly right or got a little scratch on it, and want it replaced, or fuss about something else. Always super-critical, and that has gotten worse through the years, 'cause the people who are doing the buying don't know. Last year the guy who was doing the buying was the dishwasher. Today he is running the restaurant. Hell, he doesn't know what to expect. Is there a book that tells them what to do? They are so happy to have somebody to run the place, that they use the dishwasher, or anybody they can get their hands on. And then works also farther, the manufacturers are experiencing the same problem. They will have

a sales manager that doesn't know his one end from the other. And they will fire him, and he'll go right across the street and get a job doing the same thing with another manufacturer, 'cause they are so happy to get somebody who supposedly knows what they are doing. And they will screw it up for them. I told an executive director many years ago, I wouldn't want a young man to go into this industry.

Q. The executive director of—

A. Of our trade association. I told him, there is no future in it. One of my better salesmen went to work for Cisco, been with me 20 years, possibly more. Left once before and came back. Working for a month and he came back Friday. He said that's not for him. We knew he wouldn't like it, but he didn't know. They offered him all these inducements to get him to come with them. He called up Thursday, and said 'I want to talk to you." He said 'I want to come back.' I said 'O.K. When?' He said 'I'll be here tomorrow morning.' Friday morning he came back to work.

Q. So who are his customers? Just anybody he can get any more?

A. He has a pretty good following.

Q. So, prior to this, would a salesman have one territory or they would share territories and have particular customers in it?

A. Both. Mostly, they would have a territory.

Q. And what did service mean? I assume they serviced their customers, in addition to selling them things…

A. You've brought up a point I was going to allude to. When I said McDonalds came into the picture, and they said to the manufacturer "If you want us to buy your merchandise, you have to have service for your equipment—repair service—in whatever city we put some of your equipment in." So the manufacturers said "O.K." Prior to that time, the warranty on everything that we sold, manufacturer would supply any defective material. It was up to Asheville Showcase, Leon Rocamora to install it, to repair it, to keep it going. And we had a service department. And we did the work. But we had additional margins to cover this cost, but when the change came into the picture, and cut us out of the picture entirely from the standpoint of service. Now, a restaurant can buy something from California, ship it in here, and if it needs service, within the warranty period, the manufacturer is going to furnish it to them. Before, I could say, look, if you buy from California or Atlanta, who is going to service it? We are here and we have a service department. We are going to service it. If it goes bad and needs a compressor, we'll put a new compressor in there for you.

Q. But who does service it for them if it goes bad from California?

A. The service agents, practically in every town. We have a couple of them here in Asheville.

Q. So if your equipment goes bad, you will just call one of the service agents?

A. Right. The ones doing the service.

Q. That's interesting. I did sort of mean service from the salesman's point of view.

A. Well, from their standpoint, they have a tough time. Because the margin is getting pushed down, down, because of all this competitiveness. The grocer, if he sells him a hundred dollars worth of my merchandise, he sells them a thousand dollars worth of food. Well, he has got eleven hundred dollars there to work with, with that customer, from the standpoint of commission. My man is only going to sell him a hundred dollars. And he can't make enough on commissions from a hundred-dollar sale to warrant him driving over there, to even calling a customer. Plus, my man is at a disadvantage with that food restaurant. Why?—because anything that we sell him is going to take money out of his pocket. If it's china, it doesn't bring any money in it. Glass, range, pots, whatever. The grocery man goes in there, he is going to sell him beans, potatoes, steaks or whatever; and that is going to put money in his pocket.

Q. Well, but he can amortize. Amortize your expenses.

A. No, no. He wants to see, he has to see that grocery man. He has to see him, because if he doesn't buy his beans, potatoes and steaks etcetera, he is not going to have anything to sell. So when he is in there, and he says I mean my beans and

potatoes and mayonnaise and this, O.K. , send a case of glasses, send me over this, that…

Q. He's always there, where your guy can't afford to always be there?

A. That's right, he's going to be there based on the volume he gets out of there, regular. Whereas my man can afford to call him only once a month maybe; or maybe not call him at all, because he can't buy enough from him.

Q. They must make phone calls to him.

A. Well, there is a certain amount of that. But that's still now, certain accounts, but not every customer is that interested. The high percentage of them aren't, I would say.

Q. Were you ever a salesman out on the road for here?

A. Not really.

Q. Bill is.

A. Yeah.

Q. So you have given me sort of a good picture of what it is like now. When your Uncle Lou was out, what would his day be like? Who would he be talking to?

A. He would be calling on all the restaurants, and they would all buy something from him, if they needed it. If they didn't need it, they would say 'get lost'. But if they needed it, he would get the business.

Q. And how often would he see an area like Silva or something like that?

A. He would be there at least once every other week, maybe more often, depending on how much they would buy from him. Now, we did have some competitors: we had Atlanta, we had some in Greenville, we had Knoxville. But locally, there was nobody else here. Today, Sam's is probably one of worst competitors as such. Manufacturers sell to Sam's cheaper than they have sold me the same merchandise. He can sell it for what I have to pay for it. Luckily, he doesn't have that much.

Q. I was going to say for professional, restaurant quality.

A. Well, then all the rest of the same identical merchandise I buy, they will sell some of. Same brand, same models, and everything else. I have people come in here, and want to buy a griddle. And they will go 'what make is it?' SouthBend. 'What model?' 'What's your price?' And then they say, well, I am going to go check on the Internet and see if I can get it cheaper. I'll let you know. You see, these Internet people, they don't have any showroom; they don't have sales people. All they got is clerks to write up the order and ship the merchandise to them. And the manufacturers, in a lot of cases, are selling to them cheaper than they are selling to me. Because of the volume they give them. Everything is volume today.

Q. So it sounds like there is not going to be much room for distributors anymore.

A. I don't think so. I really don't. My letter—"With all these new types of

dealers, it is getting much more difficult for the traditional dealer to satisfy the manufacturing in any given market. So what do we do? Frankly, I don't know the answer, but I do know if something isn't done soon, there won't be too many traditional dealers left to serve the in-users. There is enough brain-power around, until the dealers and manufacturers sit down and talk about what is going on, nothing can or will be done. It is time to get started before it is too late, if it isn't already too late." That's my letter.

Q. So did you send that—is that going to be for the trade journal or—

A. That was to the president to our trade association.

Q. So you expect a letter back from him, or a phone call or something?

A. He didn't answer me directly, but indirectly, he is on that type of tangent, so to speak, talking to manufacturers about what is going on. He is very sympathetic to the problem, not only for us, but for himself. In fact, in one of the last articles, he was talking about how a valued customer for 20 years, and somebody came in there and the manufacturer sold him direct, and he was saying, 'how do you expect me to represent you when you go out here and take my customers away from me?' That goes on. If they are big enough, manufacturers drop their pants to get the business.

Q. So, what do you think is going to happen to this business? It is not going to actually any of your children or any of Bill's children. Someday it will just stop.

A. Well I've got a general manager, he wants to take it over. Dan Baker. I don't know why, but that's his problem.

Q. But I did want to ask you if you remembered like when you all—when the business was first on Lexington, and then it moved up to Broadway, who were some of the other Jewish business men around there that you remember?

A. Well, right across the street was Tippie Gallenbeck.

Q. And what was his business?

A. It was –it wasn't clothing, but it was underwear, socks, things like that. Notions. And then his brother had a kindred business to us—not kitchen equipment, but kitchen machines. For commercial. Norman Salton's dad had tire recap place around on College Street. Fred Bowman had an upholstery business up on College Street. Jack Linbergh had his place on College Street. ???

Q. Were you particularly friendly with the Jewish businessmen as opposed to the other businessmen, or did y'all have any kind of a club or lunch or hung out or anything?

A. No. We'd see each other. Sy Fleigle had a furniture street up the business there, and he and I use to go to lunch every day.

Q. Where was your place to go to lunch?

A. We went to Three Brothers mostly. That was, now Bill, he goes out with different people all the time. But he is on the outside most of the time.

Q. Anything else you want to add about Asheville or the Jewish community or the old days or—

A. No, I didn't think I could talk 2 ½ hours about it. (laughter)

Q. You were a good talker. We will let you listen sometime, if you want to recap. So you have a minute to focus on some of these pictures.

A. ___ and I said you are supposed to have a spinning rod. Said nobody told me bring down the river all day long. She caught twice as many fish as I did.

Q. So you got a little jealous about that, huh?