JOE LICHENFELS
April 25, 1994
Interviewed by David Schulman

JL: Paternal grandfather, Joseph Lichenfels was his name. He was from Germany and he came over with his family, his children, not his wife. His wife died in Germany before he came over. They came over, my father was 9 years old and my father was born in 1877, so that means that they came over in 1886, which incidently was the date that my mother was born. Anyway, Joseph Lichenfels had five sons and two daughters. Gustav, my father, was the youngest son. Gustav was born, according to the memorial plaque in the temple here, he was born Sept. 14, 1877. He was born in Goettingen, Germany, which is a university town. His father, Joseph, was an orthodox rabbi. Joseph's wife, Roshen, which is the German spelling for Rose I guess, died in 1884, which would have been two years before they came over. Joseph's childrens names were Jacob born in 1862 I believe, Robert 1864, Anna Lichenfels who married Siegfried Sternberg and raised their family here in Asheville was born in 1875 I believe, William was born in 1870, Amel in 1873, Johanna 1866. There is a tie between Johanna and Asheville in this way. Johanna married a man named Lippincott and I have no records at hand right now but I seem to remember that Chicago is somewhere in there. And they had a son named Joseph, obviously named for the same reason I was named Joseph. I believe there's a rule against naming sons after the father, but they can be named after the grandfather if the grandfather's not living at the time. Anyway, he was named Joseph and at some point after his birth, Johanna died and Joseph was adopted and raised by his Aunt Anna Lichenfels Sternberg here in Asheville. And he took the name Joseph Sternberg. And Joseph Sternberg is Jerry Sternberg's father.

I: Let me see if I've got this straight. Anna Lichenfels was a sister to your father, Gustav.

JL: And Johanna Lichenfels was also.

I: And Johanna had a son named Joseph. And then Johanna died in America and Anna was married at that time to Siegfried Sternberg.

JL: That's the only time she was married.

I: And so she took in her nephew and adopted him and raised him as their son.

JL: Now Anna and Siegfried had other blood children. The eldest was Rose who was Buddy Patton's mother. She became Rose Sternberg Patton. And she later, after Roy died, she married Roy Patton and they had Buddy Patton and two daughters. Then after Roy Patton died, she married a man named Ericson. And they did not have any children together.

I: So actually Buddy Patton and Jerry Sternberg are cousins, first cousins.

JL: First cousins, once removed. See, Rose Sternberg Patton was my first cousin because she was the daughter of my paternal aunt, Anna Sternberg. So Rose is my first cousin, which means according to, if I know how to translate these things, Rose was my first cousin and therefore Rose's children would be my first cousin once removed. Rose's children would be my children's second cousins. So Buddy is my first cousin once removed and Jerry Sternberg is my first cousin once removed.

I: And Buddy Patton and Jerry Sternberg.

JL: Buddy is the son of Rose and Jerry Sternberg is the son of Joseph Sternberg and they were first cousins. So it would be second cousins I guess.

I: Did Siegfried Sternberg marry his wife in Germany or here?

JL: I think here. I'm not sure. Let's see, according to this, Anna was either, this is crazy. In anticipation of your visit, I went to temple and looked on the memorial plaque. Years ago I was on the board of trustees at the temple and I was chairman of the memorial committee. But Isaac Lichenfels was a first cousin of mine because he was the son of Jacob, who was my dad's brother. Isaac saw a German-Hebrew family prayerbook and he looked in it and he copied down the names from there. Maybe about a year or two before Isaac died, he came over here. He'd come over here every once in a while. And he had the then rabbi, I believe, translate from the Jewish year and month to the Gregorian or some other counter that we use today. Interestingly, they didn't give the month and the day. They just gave the year, the rabbi did. Now let me show you the discrepancies that I discovered the other day. From Isaac L., see that's this, Joseph year born 1833 and now there's no argument about the year he died. But there's this argument about the year born. Roshen Raven, Rose, born in 1837. Now you get down, I don't have any information, there is no plaque for Isaac's father.

I: Now Isaac Lichenfels' father was Jacob.

JL: Yeah. And Robert, this lady, I don't know whether she's still alive or not, but she had her 90th or 95th birthday some years ago, 4 or 5 years ago. And I've got sort of a warped sense of humor and I sent her a graph that I showed on arithmatic grid paper and I said now when I was one month old you were such and such years old and so that means you were so many times older than I. Then a few years later, you weren't quite that many times older than I am. And so then I had drew three points and then I drew a line on it and I said now this proves Rosalie, Rosalie was Robert's daughter, this proves that by August 1988 or 89 I will be as old as you and a few months after that I will be older than you. I got a letter back from her saying, I don't understand a bit of this but it was nice to hear from you.

I: The Lichenfels, Gustav was your father. Now, he had other brothers in Asheville.

JL: No. He had a sister in Asheville, Anna. Now here's Anna. According to Isaac, Anna was born in 1867 but according to the memorial plaque she was born in 1875. Let's skip down here and see about Johanna. Johanna according to Isaac was born in 1875 but according to the memorial plaque, she was born in 1866. Now you see the difference, eight years there. And I'm wondering if they weren't sort of switched around somewhere. I just put it down and I don't know the answer. Gustav, in fact, is shown in 1878, but dad certainly knew his birthday and he always had it 1877. To get back to what you were saying, dad had no relatives here except Anna. I believe, I wouldn't emphasize this in your writeup cause you might hurt the feelings of Jerry or somebody, but I believe that Siegfried Sternberg and Anna Lichenfels were either first cousins or second cousins.

I: That happened alot in those days. I know alot of families cousins would marry.

JL: Who did I know here? I knew Jacob. When I was just turning 12, my father in anticipation of my barmitzvah the next year, wanted me to have an

orthodox barmitzvah. I don't think he put it in those terms, but that's what it amounted to. He was raised orthodox you see. Now, here in Asheville, my father and my mother were about as reform as you can get.

I: Your mother's name was what?

JL: Edna Muriel Long Lichenfels. So in hindsight I thought it was a little odd that he wanted, and the rabbi we had here at the time, a man named Rabbi Moses P. Jacobson, a very fine guy and very reform. And I noticed that, I saw in print somewhere, maybe it was in the Jewish Times Outlook where some rabbi was saying, we were so reform that we were the next thing to being Christian. And I almost had that feeling in the past. Anyway, he sent me up to Maine, Scothegan, Maine, a place where they had the first summer theater in the country way back then. Why, because Jacob had a farm up there and Jacob lived in New York. He was a manufacturing jeweler I believe. But they bought a farm up there to go up there during the hot weather. And it was a pretty good sized piece of property and so forth. And Isaac, who was nine years older than I, Isaac was Jacob's son, had just graduated CCNY. And Isaac taught me Hebrew. This was a work and study deal, I mean road work, not on the public roads, but we fixed the road from the highway up to the farm house. And boy that was moving boulders and digging and sweating and so forth. This was the summer of 1927.

I: And you were 11, 12, 13?

JL: I was just about, my 12th birthday was on July 4th. And two days after my birthday my grandmother Long died, my maternal grandmother. And I was very close to her.

I: Now where was she from?

JL: She was from Baltimore and came here in 1888.

I: So that's when you had some time with Jacob.

JL: Had some time with Jacob and with his wife, Aunt Gussie, and Isaac taught me the Hebrew. And I came back to Asheville of course. And then I studied with the orthodox rabbi here.

I: What was his name, do you remember?

JL: I don't remember. The temple was located on what is now that crazy interchange right near the Sheraton Inn you know. You know where the accidents happen all the time. And it was located there. I went there and studied with him. And then I had what really was a probably more orthodox barmitzvah than what they have today over on Murdock Avenue here. And had it in reform temple. Chanted the , chanted my portion in the tora, chanted the _____, and read in Hebrew my portion of the _____. Then gave a speech in English. My grandfather Long, now this is him right here, my maternal grandfather, and that was taken in about 1925 or 26 in the side yard of the house I was raised in over on Cortland Avenue.

I: Is that you back here?

JL: That's me back there.

I: That's a great picture. What are you holding?

JL: A little box camera. I always had a quirky sense of humor as I told you before where I wanted to take a picture of the person taking a picture. So I was taking a picture of my mother. All my cousins love this because my Aunt Dorothy Bernie in Baltimore had that.

I: What did they do in town?

JL: My grandmother was as active as she could be in those days in civic affairs. And my grandfather Long was a secretary-treasurer of the Asheville cottonmills, which was the old cottonmill down on Riverside Drive.

I: And your parents, what did they do?

JL: My mother followed in her mother's footsteps and was even more immersed in civic and religious affairs here than she was. And my father was in business as an equal partner with Siegfried Sternberg.

I: So he was in the salvage and cattle hides?

JL: Cattle hides and salvage, yeah. They had a logo on their stationary back then as I recall. It said, We buy anything and sell everything. It was S. Sternberg and Co. I don't know whether it's interesting. But dad told me the story of how he happen to come to Asheville.

I: I'd like to hear that.

JL: He went to Stevens Institute in Hoboken, NJ, for a while. I don't know whether he graduated or just took some courses there. And his first job in New York City was as an office boy to some businessman who was very kind to him and interested in his welfare. I've got a paper in here somewhere of his story about how his employer, they had a holiday on Columbus Day, October 12th, 1892, which was 500 years after Columbus discovered America, and how this man said come with me and he took him to a place on the second floor where there was a balcony or big windows where they could see out through and had a table set and at 12 o'clock noon or whatever it was, had waiters come in from a high class restaurant nearby bearing food and covered dishes and so forth. They had a scrumptious meal there and they just enjoyed the Columbus Day parade in grand style. That was a high point to him. He was probably 19 or 20 at the time I guess. He then later, a few years later, found himself in Richmond, Virginia, as the manager of the American Hide and Leather Co.'s Richmond office. What they did, I don't know. I assume they must have bought hides from all over the south in carloads, lots, and maybe processed them in Richmond or sent them to other plants, other tanning plants of the American Hide Co., I don't know. And according to dad, he became ill I think with typhoid fever, and he was really miserable. And he was in a hospital there and he decided while he was in the hospital recuperating, he was going out to California. You know, go west young man. So he must have written to his sister Anna in Asheville, I guess. Because the next part of that story was that he was on the train, I guess he was going down to New Orleans first and then out by the southern route out to California. Siegfried got on the train at Salisbury or some other place. He found out what train dad was on and he persuaded dad to drop off in Asheville for a visit. Now whether he told him just that, I don't know. But Siegfried had a wonderful personality. He was a magnetic man. I remember that even though I lost touch with Siegfried after 1929 except for one time when he came down to Asheville in 1938 about. And even then he had this magnetism. He was the guy who could sell refrigerators to Eskimos, you know, if he tried to. And he was a powerfully built man. I don't think he was very tall, but he was barrel chested, you know. And

talked very low, talked very nicely. And he persuaded dad to remain here in Asheville as a 50-50 partner in his business. So that's what dad did.

I: About what year do you think?

JL: 1906.

I: And Siegfried had already been here for a number of years?

JL: I don't know how many years. I know that Siegfried, whether it was on account of the oil rush that was initiated by the Spindletop gusher out in Bowmont, Texas, I don't know what year that was, but I know that Siegfried was out there.

I: But this was before he came to Asheville?

JL: I think so.

I: So that's how your father came and came in 1906. And then there were other Lichenfels here, right?

JL: No. Only Aunt Anna Lichenfels Sternberg.

I: Mrs. Gumfort was a Lichenfels?

JL: She was my sister, my eldest sister.

I: So Helen Gumfort was your sister. And you had other brothers and sisters?

JL: Yeah, there we are right there. Johanna who has the striped top, the horizontal striped top, was my next oldest sister. Helen was born in 1912, Johanna was born in 1913, I was born in 1915 and Carolyn, the one in the middle of the three girls was born in 1917.

I: Helen passed away.

JL: Helen passed away in August of 1988. I've got some information here about her.

I: And your other two sisters?

JL: Johanna is ill. She has got Alzheimer's. And she is in Nashville. Her husband, Colonel Roland Abrams, is with her. And he fell after Johanna had to be put in a nursing home, he fell one time when he was visiting her over one of these concrete stops where you park you know, stumbled over it and broke his hip. And there's a good possibility that they are going to move to Research Triangle Park where one of their sons is. Not in his home but near him. Rod is 90 years old or will be. He was born in 1904, August 1st, so he'll be 90 years old this August 1st. But he's got all his marbles with him. Boy, he's very sharp. Johanna, wonderful girl, all three of my sisters, I was blessed with, I've been lucky. I was blessed to be born to good parents and have good sisters and I've been lucky. I've had alot of luck in my life. Lucky in the war. Alright, now to get back to business. Let's see, we've talked about my paternal grandmother, Roeschen, or Rose, died in Germany and was buried over there I'm sure. Joseph came over with his other sons and daughters and he is buried here in Asheville. And I assume, I don't know, I should have asked my father and Helen would have known, I don't know

whether Johanna would remember now, Carolyn wouldn't have any idea, I assumed he may have lived here sometime before his death, but I don't know. I think it's more likely that he would have remained up in New York with his other sons up there. He died in 1913, March 24th, 1913 which was over two years before I was born so I never got to meet him. And since he was born in 1833, that means he was 80 years old at the time.

I: That was a really old age at that time too.

JL: Let's see, the memorial plaque says he was born Jan. 3, 1833 and he died March 24th, 1913, so that's a little over, 80 years and a couple of months.

I: Tell me a little bit about your experience, the Lichenfels experience of living in Asheville. I know that's kind of vague. You told me about your father working in the cotton mill, not father, maternal grandfather. What was that like, growing up in Asheville from your experience in the Jewish community or just in the community as a whole?

JL: I don't know how to put it into words because when you're born into something, whatever circumstance you're born in, that's normal to you. And so I had a good youth, I have no complaint.

I: Who were your friends? I know Sid said he's known you all his life. Who were your cohorts?

JL: Let's see. One of my best friends was a cousin of Sid's, a boy named Leonard Rapport. He's a cousin of Sid's and he was quite a guy. He and I were Boy Scouts together. He loved history, not in the abstract. It was alot more real to him than it was to me. What went before, that's history, I didn't experience it and I'm not particularly interested in going back and experiencing it vicariously through books. But he wasn't that way. An example. There was a man here, Prof. Sondley, and he wrote a book about the history of Buncombe Co. Well, Leonard read that. I didn't read it. When we were 14 or 15 maybe at the most, he said, I'm going to hitchhike out to _____. He said, you want to come with me. I said why, what you going to do? He says, well, I found from Dr. Sondley's book that the first white settler west of the Blue Ridge is buried out there. I said really, what's that all about. So he said, well, the story is that Samuel Davidson came up over the mountains from Old Fort, which was a real fort, a log fort back in those days in 1790s I believe. And he had a wife and he had a little baby, a babe in arms and they had a female black slave. And they came up and they built a cabin somewhere there in Azalea, NC, which is a little stop just down the hill from . And he was killed. He's buried there. And he explained to me that the way Sondley described it, he had a horse. I don't know whether he had a cow or not but he had a horse. And he put a cowbell or some kind of bell around the horse so he could locate the horse if he broke loose from his tether I guess. And one night he heard the bell ringing and he went outside to see what was happening and indians had untied the horse I guess. And they killed him right there. His wife apparently could hear what was going on and knew what was going on and they locked themselves up in the cabin and the next morning they went back down to Old Fort. Now whether that was when somebody sent a punitive expedition up here to kill a few indians and say the morality begins after we were established here. It doesn't begin before. So if you're killing our people because we're taking your land, that's tough. We don't recognize it. So we did hitchhike out there. And we got off at ____ and started walking down the hill and we're walking down on the left side cause there wasn't anything on the right side. On the left side there was a little store or a little cottage, I forget which. And Leonard walked, I walked

with him, and he walked up to the front door and knocked on the door and somebody came to the door and Leonard says right out straight, we understand that there's a grave near here of Samuel Davidson, the fellow who came over back in the late 1700s and was killed by indians here, have you ever heard of that? Do you know if the grave is nearby? Oh yes, right up the hill there. It's overgrown but you'll be able to find it if you go up there. And we just walked up there and there was, I'd say about 100 to 200 yards up the hill, and there were fields, but there was some trees. You know trees can grow and regenerate and grow in 20-30-40 years. And there was some underbrush but Leonard, he found it without any trouble at all. And we pulled the vines and stuff away and looked at it. And you could make out the engraving on it. Here lies Samuel Davidson, I think it said. I think that was put up by Daughters of the Revolution in years later, I think. I think it said, if my memory is right, Here lies Samuel Davidson, first white settler west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, 1793, something like that. That's the kind of guy Leonard Rapport was. And I thought, how's he going to make a living out of that. I mean I didn't think of it at the time, but later because he got interested in that. And sure enough, Leonard, the time came, I guess it was after he served in WWII, he got a job at some point in time with the Library of Congress and quietly, he didn't make alot of noise, he became a senior archivist at the Library of Congress. And he sent me a book, he sent me some pamphlets of stuff that he worked on before that, during the depression when the Farmers Home Administration wanted to make a history of some of these alphabet agencies that FDR established and he went with a couple of them. One guy whose name was Elliot Elisopha and years later, when I was a professional photographer in New York, and Leonard came there and he introduced me to this Elliot Elisopha who was a regular photographer for Life magazine. Now Leonard, the last time he was here I think, he gave me this book here and I have started reading it. I read a few paragraphs at a time.

I: So his family was an Asheville family?

JL: No, they were a Durham family. But his mother was from Asheville I believe. His mother was related to the Bloombergs here. Her name was Dora Bloomberg Rapport. His father was a doctor or a dentist, I forget which.

I: So he grew up in Asheville.

JL: His father died in Durham and so his mother and Leonard and Leonard's sister moved here to Asheville. But I've sat in this chair whenever I catch up with things and open the book and I read of the meetings of the various people. And it's very easy to read, it's not too complex for me. And I can picture George Washington there because he kept a diary, so they dug out and they do it chronologically. So I'm sitting there and I'm looking at George Washington. It is really something.

I: It's pretty a special touch when you can take history and make it that way. Because there is so much history that is put in a manner that isn't interesting. But it is so interesting when it's put in the manner that you're talking about. Tell me a little bit about, you said that you're a professional photographer, that interests me. Tell me a little bit about your life. You said that you've been lucky and you were in the military. Maybe just give me from your teenage years, kind of a brief synopsis of your life.

JL: Let's see. I was a Boy Scout and Leonard was a Boy Scout and we both became Eagle Scouts. And one time we went down to, it was an honor apparently, we were named to go down to Charlotte. There was a Confederate Veterans Reunion. And this was about 1930. Now if you do your arithmetic and you think about a boy of

say 20. In 1865 when the Civil War was over, how old would he be in 1930, 85. These guys, I doubt if many of them were younger than that. And they put them in a school, I think a public school, cause this was being done in summer time. And they had cots all over the place and most of the guys were, unfortunately were incontinent, so it got kind of messy at times. But that was an experience and Leonard was asking them about everything they could remember and I heard a few of them but it bored me. I mean it was unreal, see.

I: So you were in the middle of a bunch of people that fought in the Civil War. That would be hard to comprehend. And if he was a history buff,

JL: He was in seventh heaven, yeah. And I remember that. And I often regretted that I didn't have more curiosity. That was one thing. Another thing was the year I graduated high school which was 1931, I wanted to go up to Maine because I'd had very pleasant experience up there, you know, in 1927 with my uncle.

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JL: And so I said to my folks, I'm getting out of high school now, what I'd like to do is hitchike up to Maine. Now that'll take a few bucks, I mean I wouldn't think of asking for money to buy train fare up there see. And I can stop off in Baltimore and stay with my Aunt Dorothy Long Bernie up there, my mother's sister and her family. Then in New York I can stop off with Uncle Willie, William Lichenfels, or Amel and then go on up to Maine and visit Uncle Jacob up there. And my folks said, well that will be very nice. How are you going to pay for it? And I looked and I says, well, how about you underwriting it? Sorry, you want to do something like that, you work for it. So I said, well, alright. And I thought, how can I earn some money. So I thought I know what I'll do. So I got some scrap lumber, built a refreshment stand right in our front yard on the corner, the corner of Cortland Avenue.

I: Cortland is where? Is that near downtown?

JL: Do you know where the William Randolph school is, it's on Montford Avenue, Montford Avenue about one or two blocks north of Haywood Street, that is it intersects Haywood Street, deadends into Haywood Street. Okay, you go down Montford to the William Randolph school and right there just after you pass it but don't leave it, that's Cortland Avenue to your left. A gas station used to be on the corner. Here's Montford, Montford follows a little bit of ridge you might say, because to the left the ground falls off, to the right the ground falls off. Beardon goes this way, Beardon goes east, Cortland goes west. You go down one or two blocks and you come to what then was Pisgah Avenue, but it's now Arborvale Road. And the folks house was right on the corner of Arborvale Road. Cortland Avenue goes this way down the hill and Arborvale Road came down that way.

I: And that was a neighborhood, it used to be a fairly heavy Jewish neighborhood at that time?

JL: No. The only other Jew that I can remember that lived on Cortland Avenue was Murray Fater. He and his brother, Ed Fater, ran a tobacco and candy and newsstand. That was on the corner of Patton Avenue and Pack Square. That would be the southwest corner. Then later they moved and they had their business on the corner of Haywood and Government, which it was then, but its now College. You know

where Pritchard Park is, you know how College goes across Haywood and goes down by Pritchard Park, well that little angle there was Government because before there was a Pritchard Park, the Federal Building was there, the Federal Courthouse and the main post office and so forth was right in Pritchard Park. Okay, so I built that refreshment stand and I was going to have soft drinks, gonna have hotdogs and candy. And I got the Coca Cola people to give me two signs that had Coca Cola down here but has a white band across the top where you can put Tom's Place or something. And I had them put Joe's Place. Two of them and I had this all figured out. And I strung a rope, climbed this maple tree that was in the corner there right where my stand was to be, climbed the tree, got permission from my across the street neighbor and tied a good rope tight right across and over the street and high enough so that trucks wouldn't, even high trucks wouldn't hit it. And I got a double socket, put a bulb in here and a bulb in there and I wanted that V thing cause I was going to put it on top of this double sign I had, see, one that you could see coming this way and one you could coming that way, Joe's Place, and I'd have a lightbulb there so even in the early evening or at night you could see it. And I got the cheapest two conductor electric insulated, electric cable that I could find which in those days they called it green twisted. It had cloth, woven cloth insulation on the whole thing and you could see the two conductors underneath. I mean, you couldn't see it, but you could feel it. And I didn't ask my folks, I just ran that line from the front porch, there was a sconce, it had a sconce here and a sconce here on either side of the front door and they had a light in there and some kind of a milk glass shade I guess. And I just put a screw-in plug that you could stick a male prong plug in there, see. And when my mother says, what's this, when she saw the wire coming out of there. I said, well I need some electricity for the light and for the hot plate, which incidently was my grandfather Long's old hotplate that he was not using anymore. By that time he was living with us because my grandmother died in 1927. And I had to heat the water you know to boil the hotdogs. And she said, well I ought to charge you for that electricity, that costs money. And I said, oh you wouldn't do that to your only son would you. So she didn't charge me for the electricity. Well I had read Tom Sawyer. And so even while I was putting up the stand, you know, the kids in the neighborhood, younger than I, were very interested and they'd ride their bicycles around and they'd say, can we help. And I said, I'll tell you what, if you're very careful and you don't waste any money, I will let you tend to the thing sometime, 2 or 3 hours at a time or something. So I had them lined up to do that. But, of course, I would let them have a drink, you know, or a bar of candy or something. And one guy, one little boy, he was the most serious and earnest of them all. His name was Robert Campbell. He was the son of the First Presbyterian minister here, very nice kid, well all the kids were nice. And years later, he became an editorial writer and then I think an editor, I'm not sure, of the Winston Salem newspaper. So I earned money from that.

I: This was in the summer.

JL: Early summer of 1931. Bought drinks from the Coca Cola Co. for something like 80 cents a case and there were 24 bottles I believe, sold them for a nickel and that's $1.20 so I made 40 cents but I had to buy a little ice. Candy, sold candy and sold hotdogs and you'd be surprised at the people who would stop and try a hotdog and so forth. And so I accumulated, I don't know, 20 or 30 dollars maybe. And I was ready to go. But I didn't want to go by myself. So I called up, Leonard Rapport and I had talked about this and we planned to go. I thought we had planned to go together. So I called him up one night, I said Leonard, my father told me he's sending a truckload of butter in tubs up to Baltimore tomorrow morning so it's now or never cause we can ride on the top of that truck all the way up to Baltimore so we won't have to wear out our thumbs you know. He's says, Joe, I'm

sorry I can't go with you. He says, I've got to work. I've got to work and earn some money. And I said, oh boy. Well we had planned this, okay. He says, but maybe Dick Bloomberg will go with you. This Bloomberg was Blumberg not Blomberg. This Blumberg, Richard Blumberg was my age, I think about a year older than I was. I was younger than most of the guys in my class. His father, he came to Asheville with his father. They lived in apartments, I think they call them the Elizabeth Apartments. I don't think it's there anymore. It's down if you cross the bridge from Five Points of Broadway there, you know, that goes over to Cumberland or Flint and so forth. They had an apartment building, if you were going on that just as you leave Broadway to go west, if you were to stop and look over your righthand railing there, you'd see down below a pretty good sized little apartment building, brick and I forget what they called it. I think it was Elizabeth Apartments. Dora Rapport lived there with her son and daughter, Leonard and Hilda. In an apartment above them I believe, Mr. Blumberg, Dick's father, lived there with Mrs. Blumberg and Dick. Dick went to high school with me and I think he was in my troop of Boy Scouts, yeah, I'm sure he was. So Leonard says, can't go with you Joe, but maybe Dick would. I says, I haven't even talked to him about it. Well, he says, call him up and ask him. So I called up Dick Blumberg and told him, I can darn near remember my words verbatim. Dick, Leonard Rapport and I were supposed to hitchike to Maine and we didn't know exactly when we were going to leave but something's come up and I explained to him about the truck. Tomorrow morning, that's the time, it's now or never. Would you like to hitchike up there with me. He says, just a minute and I'll ask my folks, just like that. So, I don't think I had to wait more than 5 minutes on the phone and he gets on the phone and he says, okay Joe. And I thought to myself, some world shaking events are decided just like that, you don't have to talk about them for months and months and months. To me, that was a big thing, to hitchike up there. You have to remember that in those days there wasn't the onus against hitchiking that there is today. So we did leave very early in the morning and the truck just kept going, stopped only for gas. It had these big wooden tubs of butter and had a few planks on top and we took a couple of blankets, old army type blankets, olive drab stuff, cause we knew that night it would get kind of cool. It was pretty warm but there was alot of wind up there. And I remember we pulled into Baltimore, the wholesale market and, oh my God, it must have been 8 o'clock in the morning. Oh, before that, I woke up and where were we, Dick woke me up I think. The blankets were flapping around us and the trucks rolling and it's noisy but we slept, I slept. Where were we, going around the White House in the truck. There's some kind of a curve or something and I thought, look at that, this is history, I'm seeing the White House. Of course I saw the capital too, so forth. So we got to Baltimore. Of course Washington is below Baltimore. We got to Baltimore and I thought it's awfully early to call my Aunt Dorothy. But I called her maybe a half an hour after that and she says, come on over. So we went over there and stayed one night with her or maybe two, I forget now. On up to New York and stayed with my Uncle William and boy did we have some good food up there. He took us out to this restaurant, you know, near there. Oh, that was wonderful. He was a jolly guy. He had come down to Asheville earlier, in the early 20s. And I remember he was skillful at carpentry. I guess, I don't know whether that had anything to do with the fact that he and Uncle Amel, I believe, were landlords of some buildings up there and I guess if they needed repairs they could fix them. Cause I remember he told my mother, he says, your back steps, wooden steps need repairing. He says, I'll do it, I'll take care of it. And he did and he did a good job. So we get up to Maine and Uncle Jacob is up there and we had a good time up there.

I: How long did you stay there?

JL: We stayed up there, I don't know, four or five days and went to see the

next door neighbors that remembered me after the four year hiatus you know, lovely people. They were real farmers.

I: And then you all thumbed back?

JL: Then we came back, yes. That was 1931. Well, that was fun. Then I went off to my first year at Chapel Hill in the fall. And then came back and I had gone out to the Boy Scout camp earlier in years before that as a camper. Now before that, this may seem funny, a guy named Ress came down here from New York. And Ress had been an athlete. He was Jewish. Joseph Ress I believe was his name. He graduated Yale University and he was an athlete up there I believe. And he had launched a boys' camp business here in Asheville.

I: Do you remember the name of it?

JL: Yes, Camp Oceola in Hendersonville, just in the outskirts of Hendersonville on Lake Oceola. It had been a Presbyterian camp I believe, under a different name or maybe it was under that name, I don't know. But he bought the camp and so he was out trying to get campers. So the way he did that, he would go to a town and go to the Jewish synagogue and meet people and talk to them. So he came here to Asheville and he somehow became friendly with grandmother Long and grandfather Long and so grandmother Long and grandfather Long treated their two grandsons, Robert Bernie of Baltimore, that's Aunt Dorothy Long Bernie's son and me to summer camp at Camp Oceola. And a year later, maybe, when I heard or whenever it was I heard how much they'd paid, $300, and you know that was alot of money back then. (PAUSE) I damn near choked when I heard it cost $300. In 1928, then, I went out to Boy Scout camp cause I became a Boy Scout in fall of 1927. In 1928 I went out to Boy Scout camp, $1 a day. So if you're there 60 days or 62 days, it's $62. And I had a wonderful time, much better time than I had at Camp Oceola, much better time. And they taught us things that were more useful, there the idea was to make you more self-reliant. The old be prepared kind of thing.

I: So you went to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and did you graduate there?

JL: No. I was there freshman year, sophomore year and the first third, in those days they had quarterly thing, so I completed that and then I left and came home to do something else.

I: You mentioned several times about photography, did you be a professional photographer for some time?

JL: Yes. How that worked out was, I was working at the cottonmill. I came home and I worked at the cottonmill here as a cottonmill hand for 31.5 cents an hour. And I was supposed to work in every department of the mill and I did. And I was supposed to keep notes and I did, make notes. And I learned how to work every dog-gone machine in the mill, you know. And so I got finished with that and I said, what's next. I went to Mr. Payne, the president, I said Mr. Payne I've done everything that you said to do when I first came here four years ago. By that time I was making 41 cents an hour I think. Would you please give me some responsibility or fire me? Enough's enough, you know. Before that I had asked one of the officers in Greensboro...

I: Is this in the mid-30s?

JL: Yeah. Well, I'll backtrack just a little bit. The first thing I tried

to do, I tried to get into the U.S. Army Air Corp at the time as a flying cadet, take pilot training. I got a letter from the university saying that I had completed this and this much time there. What they had, they had so many applicants for the few openings they had, this was competitive as hell because this was early 1934 and I kept after it though. And finally they said, I didn't realize at the time, in hindsight I knew, finally they said, well, it amounted to this, well, if you want to and at your own expense you may come down to Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, to take a physical exam. So I took the bus down there. Today they wouldn't do that. They pay your way down. But I went down there and I had the physical exam and they tried to find every damn thing wrong with me they could. I mean it was very apparent. They were reluctant in the paperwork before I even got there. And I kept pushing them and pushing them and pushing them. And I was rejected. And why was I rejected? They didn't tell me at first and I had to push at them to tell me why. And there was a muscular imbalance in the left eye and I had a couple of opthamologists check that. Not at that time but a little later and they said, you don't have any muscular imbalance in your left eye. And then there was something about a Schneider color test that I was weak on. And I thought to myself later as a professional photographer, and having that in mind, I would ask other guys this is a particular shade is it not? He says, right on the nose. So I wasn't color blind. But one thing was I was trying to be so completely honest with them. They said, have you ever fainted? And I said yes. Tell us about it. So I told them. I says, I remember it was in church and I was standing up and I had had some diarrhea or was about to have it I think and all of a sudden I found myself on the floor looking upward. So years later Dr. Irvy Stephens here, when I told him about that, he said, that's when you have diarrhea you have that sudden emptying of your bowel and your vagus nerve takes over. It's a sort of a separate nervous system or something and that could cause you to faint. So anyway, so they said and also it's because of your history of fainting without cause. Now that's the one thing they may have been justified in because last fall, oh, if I get diarrhea I would, I know this is going to crap up your tape (no pun intended). But once in a while if I get a sudden attack of diarrhea, I start to feel faint sort of. And last fall I was out raking leaves and I came in and sat down and we began to eat and I felt funny. I said, I have to sit down, that's right, I was doing something in the kitchen. I have to sit down and I did and my wife says, you just keeled over like that and your mouth dropped open. She says, my god, you scared the devil out of me. The upshot of that was my heart had skipped a few beats. It wasn't your classic heart attack. And the upshot of that was they put a pacemaker in me.

I: Talking about the 30s, talking about Asheville history, wasn't there alot about the, like a murder at the Battery Park Hotel and they arrested a bellboy or something? Wasn't there like, Life magazine came here, do you remember any of that?

JL: The name of the girl was Helen Clevenger.

I: I've seen alot about it in the old Asheville Citizens and it seemed like there was alot of, sort of the whole town was sort of in a panic or something. And then I've talked to people later who said that still alot of people believe the guy was railroaded or something like that. That it really wasn't the bellboy or something.

JL: That wouldn't surprise me. I remember this, now I was working at the cottonmill at the time. I think it was 1936 when that happened. The bare facts of the matter that I recall reading were she had come with her uncle from east Tennessee, some place in east Tennessee. Now I know there were Clevengers in Kingsport, that is, in post WWII because a Jack Clevenger, his sister married Werner Lichenfels, who was Alfred Lichenfels brother. Now Mrs. Alfred Lichenfels

lives here on Stratford Road.

I: And is she your aunt?

JL: No. I'm not quite sure what relation I am to Alfred, her deceased husband. He died a while ago. I think his father and my father were first or second cousins. Anyway, Werner was Alfred's younger brother and Werner married a girl named Hazel Clevenger. And Jack became his general manager, you might say, Werner's general manager and then later ran the business himself after Werner died. So the girl who was murdered was Helen Clevenger and I never asked Jack whether there was any relation. She came here on a visit with her uncle. I forget whether his name was Clevenger.

I: I believe it was. He was from North Carolina State I think it said, a professor of agriculture.

JL: I didn't know that. I had no idea what he did. And there was this big black man, young man who did some kind of, I don't know whether he was a bellboy or some kind of janitorial work, I don't know. I think they called him a Hallboy. And the local police were unable to come up with, I don't want to say they were unable to come up with a suspect, but they didn't. And I guess somebody was crying for action and what do they do? They got a New York detective or at least one to come down here. They might have gotten two, I don't know. And in pretty short order, this guy was arrested and indicted, I don't know whether he was indicted by a jury, I just they would have had him indicted by a grand jury. And tried and convicted and I think put to death.

I: Yeah, he was executed. I think the black community, maybe some of the white community thought too, thought that he, they just sort of rounded him up just to solve it but that he didn't do it. Although he did confess to it according to the papers. But then he said he was beaten into confession or something. When you mentioned 1936 I remembered that date.

JL: I was working at the cottonmill at that time and we had an hour off for lunch and I would come home for lunch. And, in hindsight, that was a luxury that I could come in my parents house there and hollar to the maid there, Nora, I'm home and wash my hands and sit down and Nora would bring me in a hot meal. Nora worked for my folks. And now I make the lunch. I make the breakfast and lunch for my wife and then she makes the dinner. We could hire a maid but my wife doesn't want them around if she can help it and they want so damn much money anyway.

I: So eventually you left the cottonmill.

JL: Yeah. We were coming home for lunch and I'm with Bill Dribben. Bill Dribben was the son of a guy who was a fairly high officer in the mill organization. See, they had several mills. And Bill was a police groupie. He was about my age and he hung around police stations whenever he could and ingratiated himself with the cops and so forth. Bill was, something was wrong with his personality. I don't know. Driving up Hill Street, that's where the Hill Street Middle School is now I guess, and going up the hill and there was a young, black boy walking up the street and he was walking on one side. They didn't have a sidewalk so he was in the street and he was near enough the curb. And Bill sticks his head out the window, I'm driving, Bill sticks his head out the window and I can still remember to this day and I cringe, he says, get out of the street you goddamn nigger. And I thought to myself, here's this guy, he was from New York and the New York people always looked down at the bigotry and prejudice of the people down

south. Oh I'm telling you. And years later, my best friend in New York, a very nice guy, good family and he was talking about how much prejudice you got down there and we're more broad minded up here. One time, I think he and I had to ride the subway, had to ride it. That was his attitude, hell, I didn't care. If the subway got me there better and faster, fine. And there were a couple of negroes on the same car and he whispered to me something that showed that he had prejudice. And I said, why I thought you weren't prejudiced. He said, I'm not prejudiced. He says, they know their place.

I: That says alot doesn't it?

JL: Yeah, that tells you alot.

I: So you worked in New York as a photographer for some time?

JL: I wasn't getting anywhere here and asked Mr. Payne to fire me or give me some responsibility. And a couple of weeks later the superintendent came to me and says, we're going to bring up a, a mill down in Greensboro has got an old sandforizing machine, one of the first ones that was made. They've used it for years and years and years. Now they're getting a brand new modern machine, much more efficient and so forth. What they're going to do, they're going to dismantle that old machine and bring it up to Asheville. Would you like to be the fellow to learn how to operate that machine or shall we get somebody else? And I figured that's from Mr. Payne by the way of the superintendent, see, to give me some responsibility. I said, I'm your man. So later I spoke to Mr. Payne, I said, I don't know how long it's going to take me to learn how to run that. How long can I stay down in Greensboro? He said, Joe, I don't tell a man to do this job and then, I don't tell a man to run down the street and then I tie his legs together. I don't do that. I said, okay. So I went down there. I was down there 3 or 4 weeks and I made sure I knew how to run that thing. I knew I knew how to do it. It was a little bit of an art besides being some science and mechanics. Not to go into it too much, you say you can't push a string. Well, this guy, Sanford Cluett, who was of Cluett-Peabody, he didn't take every addage at face value. He had to see for himself and he devised this way of shrinking cloth, shrinking it to measure in other words by pushing strings. It's one of those kinds of things, well, why didn't I think of it. So I went down there and I learned it and then I came back and, of course, I saw the new machine down there. It was like a ten carat diamond compared with a little one-quarter carat diamond. And I thought I was going to have to dismantle the machine. And I thought, my God, I've got good mechanical aptitude but I don't know about this. So I was relieved when I heard that I didn't have to dismantle it, that they would send a master mechanic from Paterson Machine Works up in Paterson, NJ. And he dismantled it and they put it on a flatbed truck, trailor and so forth, covered with waterproof stuff and brought it up here. As soon as he came here, that master mechanic, he was a young guy, I don't think he was much older than I was at the time, maybe two or three years. I said, I'm going to apprentice myself to you and I'll be your man Friday, help you out in any way you want me to. He says, that's good. And I learned alot from him. And I helped install it and then when we started I produced saleable cloth, the first yard and never did have any that was unsaleable. No learning expenses. Now the sanforizing machine operator down there, the one that operated this old machine and was now working on the new one, he was making $1 an hour, he said he made that on the old machine and he was making it on the new machine. He said, the new machine actually, although it's bigger and faster, it's less difficult to run. So, I come up here and after a few months and had successfully operated it and had trained one guy and as soon as he was able to do it, then we went on 12 hour shifts. He did it

during the night and I did it during the day. Then I trained another guy and had it down to 8 hour shifts. And then they raised me from 41 cents an hour to 46 cents an hour. And my tongue stuck in my throat, I was thinking, goddamn it, that guy's making $1, I'm making 46 cents. If I go to them and ask them for more money, maybe they'll give me 75 cents if I make a good case out of it. But am I going to have to do that for the umpity ump years. This is a dead end job. I'd done real good I thought see. Well, maybe inspired by my mother who had a good camera and she took alot of family pictures, you know, as years went on, I began to take pictures when I was in my teens. And enjoyed it and seemed to have a little ability at it and made some of my equipment, like a primary source of light with a tin dishpan and porcelain sockets bolted on to it and put photoflood bulbs in there. And I came across something the other day when I was getting stuff that I thought might interest you and I came across something that doesn't have anything to do with that except it had... Back in 193something, late 30s it was, this fellow, Dr. Louis Spits, came to Asheville. He was the father or father-in-law of a rabbi that we had here. And he was an MD, this guy, Dr. Spits.

I: Was that a rabbi at the temple?

JL: Rabbi at the temple, yeah. I don't think the rabbi's name was Spits, therefore the rabbi would have to be some other name. And he saw some pictures, some portraits I'd taken of my mother and my sister and he asked me to take a picture of him. And I thought, now he's so full faced, I ought to try to narrow his face a little bit but it's a pleasant face. So instead of having a little size like this, and that's an enlargement you know there, that I decided to get it as big as I could.

I: That's an interesting portrait.

JL: And so he put something on here, To Joseph From His Friend, Dr. Louis Spits, take care to be better than you think you are. That's kind of an enigma, I don't know what that means. Would you interpret that for me?

I: It sounds good, but I don't know exactly. I guess to always try harder or something.

JL: I guess. So, I show you that because that was, I used that broad primary light source, you see, for that.

I: So you became a photographer. Are there any particularly memorable photos or people in Asheville that you can remember? You took mainly portrait photos?

JL: I took some on some other stuff.

I: I was just wondering if there was anything that stood out in your mind as an interesting...

JL: Yeah. There was a family here named Pollock, Lou Pollock and Ben Pollock. Ben Pollock was the younger of the two brothers and they had a shoe store here, big business. And Ben had a wife, Helen Pollock, a very nice lovely person, but who God graced with almost ugliness, that is her face.

(END OF TAPE)