

RUTH LOWENBURG

4-19-94

Interviewed by David Schulman

I: Ruth, where do we start? Do you want to start with family history?

RL: We arrived in Asheville on April 15, 1937. And the day was hot and humid and very sultry. We came in on the Southerner and when I first got into the station and had a slight, very quick view of what was going on around, I noticed to my right there was a sign that said, White Only. And then another sign that said, Black Only. Having been born and bred in the north, I knew that those things existed during the Civil War and before that, but I didn't realize that they were still doing those things. A hundred years ago my husband's grandfather was sent here as an apprentice to a family by the name of Hildebran who were in the furniture and upholstery business. He was 15 years old. And we got to Asheville a hundred years later. The amazing thing was that we never knew that this was so. But my sister-in-law who's a resident and native of Norfolk, Virginia, had picked up a book at the library that was all about the growth of Norfolk and in that book there were 10 men who were featured who helped develop the city of Norfolk from its beginning. As a boy, as I said, he worked for Hildebran and it occurred to us that we had a guest in our hotel, The Manor, who's name was Hildebran. And we found out that that Hildebran was her great grandfather. And, of course, that seemed very amazing.

I: So the Hildebran family here in Asheville was related to the Hildebran family in Germany.

RL: When the war broke out, my husband's grandfather entered the Civil War, went into the Civil War and had a very hard time. And when he was discharged from the army after the war, he was sitting on the curb in Norfolk when somebody next to him started to talk and they found out they were brothers.

I: Do you know what his name was? Your husband was David Lowenberg and it was his grandfather?

RL: Yeah, his grandfather was also David Lowenberg. My husband was David Lowenberg III.

I: And after the war was over in Norfolk he accidentally met his brother.

RL: That's right. And the story is that they were both hungry and tired and in rags. Well, somehow, my husband's grandfather, David, travelled to places like Goldsboro, all of the towns around here.

I: As a peddler?

RL: Yes, as a peddler. Most of the people who came from Germany and other countries became peddlers. That's how they survived. It wasn't long before he opened a shoe company called The Lowenberg Boot and Shoe Co. on Main St. in Norfolk. And as time went on, he became very successful and owned a lot of different businesses. And he remained in Norfolk and became a very, very active member of the community and built the first hotel of its size in the south. It was the Monticello and was very well known.

I: This would be the 1880s or something like that?

RL: Yeah. They built the Monticello Hotel, which I said was the biggest

building that had been built in the south. And after that, he founded the Jamestown Exposition in Jamestown, VA. A lot of these things I never knew until I read this book. Also, a rabbi, I forgot his name, but he's a very prominent man, he's the head of the whole Jewish congregation. And he wrote a genealogy of all the people who came to Norfolk, to America, in the last, from 1850 on. And the whole family history is in there.

I: Do you know what happened to David's brother, the brother that he met?

RL: No, except that there were 4 children. And my husband's father was named Jake. And another one was Harry, who became an attorney and settled in New York. Well, to make a long story short, they all made a lot of money. But the Lowenberg's in Norfolk bought a lot of land and a lot of it turned out to be under the Atlantic Ocean. And when his grandfather died, I have the clipping some place from the New York Times, they called him the Reverend Dr. Lowenberg. And it told all about his life.

I: So your husband grew up in Norfolk.

RL: Oh yes, the whole family. They all stuck. And there are a lot of them are still there. And when his grandfather died, he left 1 million dollars. So he was considered very influential at that time. There was 3 sons and 1 daughter and they were all left a quarter of a million dollars. Well, in 1880, 1890 I guess that was like 50 million now. Well, in any event, they became a prominent family in Norfolk and along with them those years, there was others. And one of them, the other prominent family was Nusbaum who went into the real estate business. And when I met him the first time, went into his office, right hanging on the front wall was a picture of Warren G. Harding. And I asked why and they explained that the elder Nusbaum, Sidney, was a friend of Warren G. Harding. In fact, one of the children was named V.H. Neussbaum, Jr. The V was Virginus. It was supposed to be a girl named after the state of Virginia. It ended up being a boy, so they named him Virginus. And he became a very prominent man in his own right. He was vice mayor of Norfolk for a number of years, established a bank there. And his name became Pooch. Because he was like a little dog, they said, I asked why. And he was the baby of the family and the three sons and one daughter who were left a quarter of a million each became very wealthy after that but lost it. And the only one who held on to the money was the sister, Minnie. And when I came into the family, I had an appointment with her to meet her. And the appointment was like 2:25. That was my husband's aunt, Minnie.

I: And she wanted to approve you, is that what it was?

RL: Well, it was customary to meet the new member of the family. They wanted me to meet everyone.

I: But you had a specific time to be there?

RL: Oh, very specific. She was so exact. And she had a black man who was her chauffeur and valet, a man about town. And his name was Tom. And everything was Tom. She was a little old lady. At that time, she was about 72 or 3 and she looked a lot older than I do now at 85.

I: This was about when?

RL: This must have been 1890, 1880, 1865, during the war and after.

I: How did you meet your husband?

RL: Well, that's a story in itself. I lived in Brooklyn and I went to a dentist there whose name was Al Prevett. He was a married man, married to a very lovely young lady and I became friendly with them socially. And one day he called me and said he was having three very lovely young men come to visit and he was making arrangements for three girls at that time. So I remember going there and we all paired off. And I paired off with a fellow named Gordon Sawyer Dalby. He was an Englishman. The other fellows name I don't remember but he was very young and very nice and attractive. And then there was the third one, David Lowenberg, who was very retiring, didn't have much to say. But I sort of liked him the best. So we went out that night, we had a very good time. And then we came home, he took me home and a few days later David Lowenberg calls me and asks to take me out. So I went out with him and then he had to go back to Greensboro, NC, where he was working. Well, months went by and finally I got a letter that told me he was coming to Brooklyn on business and I would I see him. So when he came we went out and that was about the third time I saw him. By the time I had seen him five times, we were engaged. He invited to Norfolk to meet his family and I remember going on a boat that went from Norfolk to New York. It was an overnight trip. He had a stateroom, good food, and I felt that I was on my first voyage. I think it was \$12, the whole thing, from Norfolk to New York, including the stateroom and the food, everything. His sister had a big home on the beach, Virginia Beach. And I remember meeting her. She was attractive. She was wearing a jumpsuit with shorts and they took me out to the house at Virginia Beach. And low and behold when I got there, there were 5 servants running around. And I thought to myself, well, what Gordon Sawyer Dalby told me about his family was evidently true. He said, you're going to meet a very, very lovely family and they're this and they're that. I said, well, fine, I'm ready. So I met them. But the last one I met was Aunt Minnie. And that was in the summer. And the next time I went back, I brought my youngest sister with me. We had a very good time. And then when he introduced me, he would introduce me as his friend or some such. And I was wondering what it was all about. He was serious all the time and I didn't even think of that. But in any event, we were engaged and his mother gave me her diamond engagement ring that came from...the family was in the jewelry business in Greensboro. They now have a store here in Asheville, Shipman's.

I: That was part of the Lowenberg family?

RL: Yeah, all related. They had a thousand cousins and aunts, oh my god, because with the southerners, evidently, everybody that's in the family is a cousin, a 2nd cousin, 3rd cousin, 4th cousin. And when they had a reunion several years ago, all the cousins got together so you can imagine how many were there. Well, after that, time went on and I had a daughter named Justine after Justine Neussbaum who is my husband's sister.

I: Was that after you came to Asheville?

RL: Oh yeah. She was conceived here. I was married in 1936.

I: And you were married in New York?

RL: No, I eloped. We were married in Chevy Chase, Maryland. And we met in Washington, DC on Thanksgiving because he was off and I was able to get away. And I traveled on the Southerner, on the train and sat up all night. I got to Washington. We stopped at the Harrington Hotel. We didn't stop, we reserved a room there, headquarters. My husband knew a young man who lived in Washington who was a real southerner. And when he told him who he was, he said, I'd like you to help us get married. So this fellow said, buried, he said, no, married. So we had to get a license and all the places were closed. So we went to the license bureau which offered us a clergyman of different denominations which they had listed

there. And asked us which we would like. So my husband-to-be said we would like to be married by a rabbi. And who was the rabbi but the head of the Jewish congregation in Washington, very prominent rabbi. And then we couldn't get married in Washington because we didn't have a license in Washington. We had to be married in Chevy Chase, Maryland. So my husband remembered, they knew people all over the world. So he remembered that his sister, Justine, had friends in Chevy Chase and he looked them up, he was an attorney there, and he was glad to see us. He said, he offers his home to a Lowenberg anytime. Then he called the rabbi and the rabbi said, oh, I'd be very happy to marry a Lowenberg. When we were married, we stood in front of the fireplace. I had a long run in my stocking, I wore a gray knitted suit that I bought in Lomans. And I thought I looked pretty snazzy. We needed witnesses. So this fraternity brother of his, ZBT, was the best man. He was a witness and the owner of the home was a witness. And they had a little girl about 6 years old and the fireplace was there and we stood in front of the fireplace. And to the side here was this little girl with her black nanny asking all kinds of questions. When we drank the wine out of the kittish cup, the rabbi told us that that was the cup that Steven Wise drank out of. And we left after the marriage, we went to a restaurant and my husband wasn't a big man but he could eat like a giant. And we went to a restaurant Thanksgiving day and he ate, oh my, he had a great dinner. I didn't eat a thing I was so angry at him that he could even eat on a day like that, but he did, I didn't, didn't hurt me any. Then, I went back to Brooklyn and he went back to Greensboro that night. So no marriage was consummated. And when I went back to Brooklyn, my friends that I went to college with and worked with gave me a going away party. And they all spent the whole evening crying. I think I must have been one of the few who ever left their homeland, so to speak.

I: Most of them married and stayed in Brooklyn.

RL: Exactly. At that time families stuck in one place, the children and grandchildren and everybody else. So I was really one of the first of my friends to leave home, which I did.

I: Your maiden name was what?

RL: Diamond.

I: I was going to mention that you had said one time in a group about how your father or grandfather had sort of used his wits about the door.

RL: Yeah, I'll tell you about that. I might also say that my husband had a few friends here in Asheville, fraternity brothers, Mortimer Conn. Mortimer Conn went to the Univ. of Virginia I think it was with my husband, that's how he knew him. Well, my husband's family really had alot of background. I never learned much about my father's family. He came from Romania, from Galatz and my mother came from Bucharest, Romania. My father's name was Pincus Diamond. We changed it later to Peter. Well, anyway, he came to America like all the other immigrants. I never realized the suffering that he and my mother and all the other immigrants of that period went through getting to America. Not until I read books by Danielle whatever her name is and Belva Plain. And she described in one of her books the passage of these immigrants on route to the U.S. and for the first time I opened my eyes and realized how my parents had suffered. What went on on those ships, how crowded they were, poor health conditions and babies being born and babies dying and it was really quite a revelation to me. But what I do know about my father is that he and two brothers, one brother and two sisters came to America. And in Romania my father, evidently, was a locksmith or something of that sort. Well when he came to America, he was an iron and steel worker, ironworks.

I: This was early 1900s?

RL Yeah. He came in 1901. And I remember him going to work and the snow was as high as this building, going to Glen Cove he worked. And we lived in an apartment building, a five story apartment building. We lived on the fifth floor. And the number of the apartment was 13. And he just didn't like that idea, he just didn't want 13. So he got the idea that he would make a plate of some sort with the name on it, an aluminium plate and cover up the 13, which he did. I must of been about 8. I went around and got orders for other name plates for the other tenants. And he heard of a man who wanted to have, a rich man who wanted to have a wrought iron railing made for his house which was a beautiful mansion in Brooklyn, in Borough Park. So my father went to him and he got the order and it was \$500. In any event, I used to see him working at the open furnace of this apartment building making all different sorts of figures with the wrought iron after he put it into the fire and softened it and then he could twist and turn it into ornamental features. So after he did that and got the \$500, he decided to go into business, which he did. He rented a store in Borough Park. They used to have these long beams that they used for buildings you know, angle irons and I-beams and I learned those terms. And when he had a long piece of steel, he couldn't fit it into the store so he used to run it through the windows. Well, he became successful. Oh, in order to bring that wrought iron railing to this man's house, he rented a push cart and took the railing in parts, piece by piece, walked it all the way over there and erected it. Well, as I said, that was the beginning. He got one job, then another job and before long he built his own building which was the Diamond Ironworks. It was in Borough Park on 39th Street between 13th and 14th Avenue. I'm sure the building is still there. Well, he became successful and the amazing thing is long before he was successful, but when he first came to America and he was a very fastidious dresser and his first overcoat and derby came from John Wannamaker. He knew what quality was and he knew it all his life. He only bought in shops like Webber and _____ and all of those. And, as I said, he became successful and things went very nicely for all of us.

I: Did you have brothers and sisters?

RL: Yes, there are five of us still living. We have three girls and two boys. And the boys went to camp and I went to college and the others went to college and he was able to afford it. We had a maid who did the cooking and we had a chauffeur which, you'd think we were millionaires, but my father knew how to live.

I: So this all occurred within a 20 year period or less?

RL: Less. I was in college. I was in high school long before, I was in public school when he was in business.

I: So he achieved very quickly.

RL: Yes. And we were all able to enjoy those things at the right time. And when people start to talk about their heritage and their background, their opening sentence always is, we were very poor. Now I couldn't say that, we weren't very poor. We were affluent. We were some of the few who became affluent, who sent their children to colleges, you know. And that was a sign of affluency, the way we lived. We had a lovely home. And then came the Depression. And my brother, who was an engineer, stood on the WPA line to get any kind of a job.

I: So it really changed things for the whole family.

RL: Well, it didn't so much because I had brother-in-law who had just married my older sister, 18 months older than I who was a CPA. He took a mortgage on the machinery so that my father was able to continue. So he wasn't as badly off as other people. But those were the times when builders that owed money, \$85,000, I remember, one man jumped out of a window. They committed suicide, one after another. The wealthiest men in Borough Park. They were rich people and they became poor overnight, you know. A lot of them gambled in the stock market.

I: So you were married in 1936. And, getting back to your situation, you didn't move to Asheville immediately then, right?

RL: Yes, I did. I moved to Greensboro where my husband was employed.

I: And how long did you stay in Greensboro?

RL: About a year or two. And in those days you talk of southern hospitality. They really showed us southern hospitality. We were taken in with open arms in the whole Jewish community. And from there we went to different places like Akron, Ohio, which was a miserable place to live. When I got to Greensboro, after I left him at the train going back to Greensboro and I went back to Brooklyn, when I went back my father bought me a trousseau which was customary in those days and furniture for a house.

I: Trousseau meaning clothing.

RL: Right, night gowns, negligees, had all this fancy stuff.

I: That must have felt good, didn't it?

RL: Oh yeah. Well, by that time I was used to good, you know.

I: Now people get married and it's sort of nothing special.

RL: They don't even buy a trousseau.

I: That must have been something a girl would look forward to.

RL: Oh yes. She bought things she never wore. And we'd lived in Greensboro and something happened to me in Greensboro that happened two other times and I was amazed. The house that my husband rented didn't fit the furniture. The furniture was too big for that little house, so we put it in storage and we moved to the O. Henry Hotel where a lot of young couples lived. I guess they found it cheaper than living in a house. O. Henry Hotel, it's still there. And when I found that that didn't work, my sister was married at the same time, three of us were married in one year. So we sent the furniture to her and she still has part of it.

I: Now was your husband working for Shipman's?

RL: No he never worked for Shipman's. At that time, he got a business education. What do they call it now? Well, he had a B.A. in business, a little law, all of that. And these people really were educated from fine colleges and universities. But they had no profession so to speak. They didn't become lawyers or doctors. They were educated. The wealthy people educated their children, never thought of the fact that they'd have to earn a living. A lot of the men you speak to today, the older men, are college educated but they have no profession. Anyway, so he worked for chain stores, like Lerner's. And that was prominent at that time.

That's all they really had. And he worked for one and did you ever hear of the Charles Stores. Well he came here as assistant manager of the Charles Stores. That how we got to Asheville.

I: And the Charles Stores, weren't they owned by a Jewish family?

RL: Yes. And I can't think of this man's name. He was a very good friend of my husband's family. That's not how he got the job, but he knew the whole family. And in Florida, in Palm Beach, we knew him and met him. He was a very wealthy man and very philanthropic.

I: So you eventually moved to Asheville and you got here, when did you say, when was the year?

RL: 1937.

I: And tell us a little bit more about the early years in Asheville.

RL: Well, when we got to Asheville, people used to talk about the people in Tennessee, that they didn't wear shoes, they went barefoot. Well, Asheville was considered hoity-toity so to speak. People didn't go around in their bare feet. But it was pretty primitive. Those were the days when you bought a fryer from the Rosens on Lexington Avenue for 19 cents. And my husband, because he was a college graduate, etc., etc., the management of the Charles Store paid him from the store and from the New York office. So he was getting more than most of them. He was getting \$45 a week.

I: And that was on Patton Avenue right? Charles Stores?

RL: Yes. And he stayed there. And I said to him one day, I mean he was the kind of person that was not very aggressive or pushy. He was a laid back southerner. Say we had a discussion about dogs one night and somebody said, oh that must have been a bloodhound, that must have been this, that must have been this, nobody knew the answer. But my husband comes up and tells me what it is. I said, why didn't you say so. He was that kind of person. So after he was in the Charles Store I don't know how many years. Two, I guess. I said, you know dear, you have to ask for a raise. We need more money. I had saved \$500 the first year I lived in Asheville on \$45 a week. I always believed in saving something. And Lexington Avenue, you know, had all of the carts there and the little stands. And the biggest trip on Sunday was to Lexington Avenue to the market. We would buy peaches, the most beautiful peaches, a bushel full for 50 cents. So consequently I became a canner and I canned everything I could lay my eyes on. And so we ate well. He wrote them a letter and said he'd like to have a \$5 raise. And they wrote back and said, Dear Mr. Lowenberg, you should be happy with the fact and pleased that you get more than anybody else in the store because you get money from the New York office. I guess they were ashamed to offer him less. So he came home that day to lunch. We lived on Murdock Avenue in those apartments.

I: Right near where the synagogue is now.

RL: No, not the synagogue, behind the Jewish Community Center, Lennox Court and then on Murdock. We lived on Murdock.

I: Was that a Jewish neighborhood at the time or mixed?

RL: Well, Hy Sheptowitz lived there. Some people lived on the other side. The Adlers lived there and the Michaloves lived there. Dave Adler, Bill Michaloves

and Henrietta and her mother, Mrs. Solomon. He was married to Henrietta for at least 50 years and he always called his mother-in-law Mrs. Solomon. I never forgave him for that.

I: I interrupted you, he came home for lunch...

RL: And he showed me the letter. I said, put the letter down. I said, now you quit, we go into business. And that's how we heard about Milton Schwarzberg wanting to sell. It became David's Men's Shop. In the old pictures, you still see David's Men's Shop.

I: That's where the Wachovia Bank is now.

RL: Right. There was David's Men's Shop, Matthew's Jewelry, Carpenter Matthews.

I: I remember National Shirt Shops.

RL: I don't know about National Shirt Shops. Dora Rappaport. Do you know that name? Well she had a millinery shop. And then across the street was Fada's, stationary, newspapers and lunch.

I: Edwin Berge, that was later?

RL: No, Edwin Berge was right next door to us.

I: And this was about when, 1940s?

RL: Yes.

I: And you were in that business for quite some time. And didn't you have another business?

RL: Yes. We were in that business right during the war. And so that was the break that we got because we used to sell soldiers equipment, gifts, and we had pants and shirts and alot of those things. And so we made it through the war pretty well. We used to stay open 6 days a week, Saturday night till 9. And if a soldier came in at a quarter of nine and wanted to buy some pants, army pants and shirts, of course we sold them, we stayed later. And I stayed and put the cuffs on the pants by hand. We had an alteration woman, but she wasn't available at that hour. Alot of water has gone under the bridge since then, alot. Then we catered to a very nice clientele at the men's shop. But after the war, after they got outfitted again, they didn't need anything for a long time. So we got out and we rented a store from Mr. Wall. Well, anyway, he was our landlord. And we went into a boys' shop, Mr. Junior, exclusive boys clothing. Our clients were Dr. Billy Graham, the doctors' wives, all the professional wives who came to us because there was no shop like it where they had nice boys clothing. And their children went to Gibbons Hall and we sort of had a setup with them where we provided the outfits, the navy blue blazer and the gray flannel pants. But they were expensive. Guess what happened? We opened a shop in Mars Hill. Then we had a fire there. But when Billy Graham's oldest daughter was being married in Switzerland or some place. They were all going there for the wedding. And I remember the day they came in and outfitted the boys, you know, from head to toe. But along comes K-Mart and put us out of business. Mrs. Graham, a charming woman, she and alot of the other mothers realized that they outgrow these clothes, so, I was a teacher and at that time I thought that I would try teaching in Asheville. After I was married, I didn't get a job so fast in New York because it was the depression and they were employing

only men with families as teachers. And I, to make it even worse, was too young when I graduated to be a high school teacher. You had to be 21 years of age which I didn't know. Well, in any event, I thought I'd try here. So I sent away for my resume and it came and I didn't have to have any additional courses which pleased me very much. Because my last year in college I took ed courses to be able to teach. So I didn't need any other courses, I could go right ahead. But at the end of two years I would have to take the state boards in North Carolina. So I started off as...

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I: Trudy was your daughter?

RL: Yeah, Trudy's my younger daughter.

I: And so you were teaching in a school that...

RL: All her friends. Substitute. And they made spitballs and they threw them at me and they wouldn't listen to me. And I never realized that the discipline was so bad. I never realized.

I: This was in the 50s by now I guess.

RL: Yeah. Well, I got all the information to become a permanent teacher and I inquired, you know, what do they pay, actually the most important thing. At that time they had Red Cross Shoe Store on the corner. And I got all the information. I would be paid \$85 a week. And at the end of two years, in order to keep the job, I would have to take the state boards. I was out of college I don't know how many years at that time. I graduated in 1928. And so this was a long time. And to take state boards, I thought to myself, yea gods, am I going to get involved with this for \$85 a week. So, of course, I didn't take them. And then we bought the Manor.

I: So you were sort of wanting to get out of the retail business and not wanting to teach and the Manor had come up for sale or rent?

RL: No. Joe Lavin's father, Charles S. Lavin.

I: Now that's your son-in-law.

RL: My son-in-law's father. He was the originator, the original originator of all retirement hotels, the whole concept. And the whole story is in Reader's Digest, 1940 something. We have copies here.

I: Was he from Asheville?

RL: No. He was from Philadelphia. He started his business in Philadelphia in what was formerly a very exclusive boys' school. And his business was he was a real estate investigator, anyway, he knew real estate, his father, a very handsome man.

I: His son, Joe, had married Justine by this time.

RL: Yeah. And that's a wonderful story in itself. I mean it's so coincidental. We were lying in bed one night, David and I. And I subscribed to the Reader's Digest. And I never went to bed unless I read. So that night I was reading the Reader's Digest. And in it I see this article, How to Retire on \$20 a

Week, written by a good writer. Well I became very interested and I read the article. And I said to David, imagine a man who thought up something like this. He must be a very smart man. During that time Joe was already living in Asheville and managing the Princess Anne which they owned. Justine used to babysit for the Banuvskys. So Joe became friendly through the temple with the Banuvskys, a short period of time. And the Biniskis suggested that if he wanted a date, they had a nice babysitter. So that's what happened. And his father kept buying more and more and more hotels and I thought to myself, you know he said to us, when you travel you're welcome to stay at any Lavin hotel any length of time, free of charge, be my guest, which we did for a while. And while we were doing that, we were learning about the retirement hotel business. And I kind of liked the idea. I mean I saw there was money in it.

I: So it was a new concept?

RL: That's right. And he had another son who was already very successful in the hotel business, his son Bob. And he was the older of the two brothers. Bob was three years older. And at that time the father wanted to get rid of the hotel that he originated. He was going to Florida and do the same thing in Florida, which he did. And he gave this hotel to the oldest son.

I: The Manor you're speaking of?

RL: No. I forgot the name, it's all in the Reader's Digest.

I: But not in Asheville?

RL: No. But anyway, he became very successful, the son. And the father came to Asheville as one of his businesses. He rented it, he didn't buy it at first. He never bought it. We bought it after we were there a while. And when we started off, we had no idea of getting the Manor. But he suggested to me that if I wanted to get my foot in the door so to speak, I should run a concession there, hamburgers, hot dogs, ice cream, all that, which I did. In the meantime, I was thinking and looking and then one day he tells us that he's giving up the Manor, he's going to sell it to his son Bob who already had more than he could use. It was one of those family things. So I said, why don't you sell it to us. We'd like to buy it. Bob has enough and if we buy it, Joe will have something, which is what happened.

I: This was what, early 60s you think or late 50s.

RL: It had to be because we're out of it 20-odd years. So he decided to sell it to us. Took all the money we had in the bank and went into the Manor. And he was the kind of man that was very quick, very impulsive, everything was fast. We go to the bank, get the money, pay him Friday and Sunday he's gone. We're left with a hotel. Luckily, I was a good cook and I was good along frugal lines, economical, you know. Well, went into the kitchen, saw two colored cooks, two women, they were mixing a salad in a way I didn't like, so I let them go the next day. We got another cook anyway. We're in the business two weeks when the fire dept. comes around. We really had it. The fire dept. comes around and gives us an ultimatum. We will have to vacate the building at the end of the month if we do not put a sprinkler system in, \$55,000. You know, we did it. You know we paid for the sprinkler system out of the business. Because it was a frame building and it was hazardous.

I: People would actually retire there or just spend some time.

RL: No, they retired there. They would live there for the rest of their lives.

I: So there were apartments or just rooms.

RL: Rooms and suites.

I: And they would come to the main dining room to eat.

RL: Right. Mrs. R.R. Williams was our guest.

I: Her husband was the lawyer in the Pelley deal.

RL: Mrs. George, not Patton, oh who became secretary of state at that time, he was in the army, oh gosh, anyway, he became secretary of state and his second wife came to live at the Manor and she had alot of stories. We had a man who was a member of the cabinet at one time. We had the doctors' mothers, fathers, and the doctors themselves used to come on Sunday to eat with the parents and have a very nice home-cooked dinner for \$2.50. So they came.

I: So that was a large kitchen to run. How many people did you cook for?

RL: At that time, about 80, 85, three meals a day. But we catered to weddings, parties, barmitzvahs, whatever they wanted. And I was the leader. I don't know how I did it. The first Christmas we were there, we had a party of about 100 from the income tax group, IRS. In the big ballroom we had a trucking company with 200 people for a prime rib dinner which we served for I think \$2.50. We had three parties going in that one night. Oh, my husband, the girls, the boys, the grandchildren, the school friends, everybody, and you know it all went off well. And I realized that the catering business was a very good business. Oh, we catered a party for the president of Champion Paper. He and his wife were married 50 years. The poor thing was in the hospital when the affair came around. And I catered that affair too. I even remember what I served. Well, he wanted champagne. I gave him champagne. We had things like shrimp, prime ribs, all that good stuff.

I: You ran the Manor for how long?

RL: I don't remember really. I think about 12 years. And then Justine and Joe, we gave it to them. We had them give up a good business, Shoe Land, that was a going business. They were very good at it. And I said, look, if you come into the Manor, there'll be some good breaks for you. And we retired. It was great. And we retired to Florida, West Palm Beach.

I: And you just came back to Asheville...

RL: In the summers, we came and we ran the Pool. The Pool was a private club and did very well. And people would come for the summer to the hotel. And in the Pool we had all of these lovely young couples, all the professional crowd, local people. And Justine got to know them all. Jody was the head lifeguard, she was a marvelous swimmer. And as Jeff got a little older, he was a lifeguard. And many's the time they had to clear the tables in the dining room and run the dishes through the machine because the dishwasher didn't show up. You know, there were very trying times, it was a very, very difficult business. I would never want to be in that again.

I: So they ran it for several years after.

RL: About 8 years I think. But when they got in it, after a while, they realized that they didn't want it. Justine kept saying, mother, she said being with all the old people, she said, all I can do is visualize you and daddy in that position and she meant it. It hurt her too much.

I: Tell me a little bit about the Jewish community as you remember it over the years. It was never a real large community.

RL: But they stuck together. There were two groups, the synagogue group and the temple group. The temple group didn't mix with the synagogue group and the synagogue group didn't mix with the temple group. They were far apart. And there was talk of the two of them getting together and all, which never materialized. But my husband's family was reformed from 1800 and something. When we came here, I was never a great temple goer, my family weren't either. So I wasn't brought up in that atmosphere. One of the first people we met were the Slosmans. And, of course, she is definitely a schul person and still is. And so because we met some of their friends, you know, the Fagans and the Freemans, I guess you don't even know them, and the Coopers, Joe Cooper, Fields, anyway, so we joined the schul. But David never really enjoyed the schul because he didn't understand it. He couldn't read the Hebrew. So as alot of the schul members were prone to say that when we got rich, we'd join the temple. Well, we did join the temple and we went there for years. The girls were confirmed there and etc., etc.

I: Just more comfortable surroundings.

RL: Well, he was used to that sort of thing. We used to, on Saturday night, this was after Justine was born, this is one thing I want to put in that people might find funny, I was ready to deliver and the doctor I had was Dr. Kermit Brown. And he went to Biltmore Hospital. So I went to Biltmore Hospital consequently. The head nurse or somebody took me around to show me the rooms and she said, now you can pick the color of the room you want, pink or blue. So I said, well as long as my eyes are blue, I'll take a room to match them, which I did. The cost was \$5 a day.

I: Now is that the hospital behind the Biltmore Village in there?

RL: Yeah. And then Mission was where that office building is now on the corner.

I: Right off Charlotte St. What about, do you remember any of the rabbis, any interesting anecdotes or stories, I know there's lots of them that have come and gone.

RL: Well, the only rabbi I really knew well was Dr. Unger.

I: He seems to be one of the more influential...

RL: Yeah, he was reform and he had a very nice, attractive wife. And naturally he was interested in the people who belonged to the temple.

I: What about, can you give me a mental picture again, I've asked this in other tapes, but there seemed to be, at one time at least, most of the downtown area or alot of the downtown area was Jewish merchants, seems to me like almost a majority maybe. That whole block that you were on is no longer there.

RL: The other block is there. They had Pearlman's there. They had Jean West there, a fine women's specialty shop.

I: Carl Brody was...

RL: On the other side of the street. He came after I did. And also the Marter's came about a year after I did. And when I spoke to Ida Marter and welcomed her, she said, oh yes, that's all well and good but I have a daughter who just got out of college and I don't know what opportunity she'll have here. I said, you never know. She may have very good opportunities here. A year later she was married to Harry Winner.

I: So when someone came to the community, someone would call on them. I mean that wasn't organized I guess, you said you called Ida Marter, was that something that was done. A new Jewish family moved into Asheville and somebody called on them.

RL: That's right. You invited them to dinner.

I: I know we've been here 5 years and no one's called us at all.

RL: Do you belong to the temple?

I: I belong to the synagogue.

RL: Well, you know, that's also what happened during the last 20-25 years. When I came I was just torn apart by the Jewish community, the Jewish women. This one had me join her hadassah, and this one had me join council, and this one took me to this meeting and this one called for me for another meeting. And I felt very much accepted immediately, which means alot. But the Freemans, there was a man here by the name of Harry Freeman. He and his wife are both dead. He was a macha. They introduced us to a couple by the name of Fagan. Fagan's mother was an old-timer here. And this was her son, he's now dead but he was our age. So the mother was here quite some time and she bought alot of property. I speak to her. We keep in touch with each other. She went back to Jacksonville years back. And I always marveled at her entertaining. About 8-10 couples, maybe less sometimes, we'd get together at somebody's house every Saturday night and we would play penny poker and settle for half. Then the hostess would host. Irene Fagan used to bring out a cake every week that made my mouth water. And the cake was always as good as it looked. And it was a cake made in a certain size pan and when I asked her, what a delicious cake that was, how do you make it? It's a one egg cake. She'd feed 10 people. And she made the most delicious marshmallow cooked icing on top with coconut. I can still taste it. That was the entertainment.

I: So it was very sociable, but not necessarily revolving around anything religious. You were Jewish but it wasn't necessarily because of the synagogue or the temple.

RL: No, this was more or less personal, away from that. But we used to put our babies in baskets, in food baskets this big, you know the kind, half bushel with a thing over the arm. That's before they had those fancy gadgets and take them and put them in the bedroom and they'd all bawl at one time. We lived on Buchanan Avenue.

I: Where was that?

RL: That's behind the baseball park. And the Feldman's, Sam Feldman who had a grocery store here, his wife worked, then the son, Sidney, took it over. And they had a nice little house on that street. We rented. And my parents came to visit me when Justine was born and they brought me two things I remember. They brought me a Hudson Bay blanket made in Canada, very expensive but very good. And they brought me a basket, a carton full of homemade streudel. So the whole town became my friend. So when my mother and father went home, he got the measurements and made a wrought iron railing for the Feldman's because they were so nice to me.

I: So they would come down and visit once in a while or rarely?

RL: Oh no, they came often. And I used to go to New York. When Justine was a baby and Trudy was a baby, I took a helper with me.

I: And so you were in Asheville from 1937 or so till now and just a few years in there part-time.

RL: We lived in Florida for 23 years. We retained our residency and we lived in Florida. And I tell you whoever lives in Florida and has residence there is damn smart. You know that I had to pay \$600 for state tax and whatever else they call it. Florida, we didn't have that. And I thought that was alot of money.

I: Alot of residents seem to do that now. They live in Florida 6 months and here 6 months but they claim Florida for tax reasons I guess.

RL: Sure, they do it.

I: When you were in Florida, how did that change your feelings about Asheville? Or did it, I mean, did you miss Asheville or you enjoyed Florida?

RL: Loved Florida. I loved Florida and David loved Florida too because those were actually the best years of our lives. Being newly retired, which was such a wonderful thing and there was so much action there, so much going on. The Slosmans followed, the Cooleys followed, the Lureys followed, oh, so many.

I: So alot of people from Asheville ended up...

RL: In the same community.

I: So it was a large condominium.

RL: Alot of them moved now. That was a very, it was one of the first big things that was affordable for alot of people. And he became very famous and very, very, very rich.

I: Who, the developer?

RL: Levey. He was a lawyer. He was friendly with the Argentas. That's how I met them.

I: And so you enjoyed those years. You travelled I think quite a bit you said.

RL: Oh yes. We travelled throughout Europe and other places, the Middle

East, the Far East. It was the best time of my life I must say. We were free, we had no responsibilities, our children were married, they were taking care of themselves, they had children. Then I had great-grandchildren. Justine wasn't a grandmother until two years and three months ago. Now, she's going to be a grandmother of three shortly. Two are here and one is one the way.

I: Getting back to the Manor again just a minute, you talked about some people that stayed there. Are there any other special moments or thoughts?

RL: There's one very special moment that I must tell you even if the whole world knows it because I realize now what a mistake I made. We had, as I said, retired colonels, General Marshall's second wife, she was from Virginia. She wrote a book that she gave me to read, a very charming woman. One day she was sitting in the corner in the lobby and she had on this stunning outfit. It was Chinese. So I went over to her and I said, Mrs. Marshall, you look so well in that outfit. Oh thank you, thank you, Mrs. Chang Cai Chek gave me this. I mean, that's the kind of people we had.

I: You were here after this incident with Pelley.

RL: No, during.

I: Do you remember any specifics, anything about that?

RL: I know that we hated him. I knew that. And I knew where his building was and the paper he published.

I: Did you ever see him?

RL: No. You see that was all during the days of the Holocaust. And I really marvelled that we were so stupid. The whole community, not only this community but the whole world. Nobody paid attention and nobody lifted a finger to do anything. All we heard was how they put the armbands on the Jews and they drove them into the cattle cars and we heard all of that. And it seems that most of us, including myself, thought it was just...I think that most of the intelligent people in this community would have done something had they realized the enormity of it all. And we didn't, we were stupid. Educated, stupid people.

I: I'm sure it wasn't so much stupid, as just timing. It's like I was in a discussion group not long ago and they were talking about this situation and I said, well, we go to sleep at night knowing things in Bosnia, but we still sleep. Twenty years from now we may look at it and say, how could we have done that, but we do, not that it should be done.

RL: It's getting a little too widespread you know. There's trouble all over the world. I mean, the United States can't be the peacemaker for the whole world. It affects us too much.

I: A couple of people have mentioned to me that they thought that Bill Michalove was sort of like an undercover agent to expose Pelley.

RL: I never heard. I'll tell you a very short story if you turn that off because I don't want it to be publicized.

I: We're going to end the taping now. It's April 19, 1994 and I've been

talking with Ruth Lowenberg this sunny, spring day. And Ruth you might want to say anything you'd like as we end this discussion.

RL: I enjoyed speaking. I hope it sounds as well coming out as it did going in.

I: Thanks alot, Ruth. We appreciate it.