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Interviewee: Tobie M. Drucker (b. December 20, 1942, Denmark, SC; d. March 29, 2024, Columbia, SC)

Also present: Sarah Samet Drucker, Tobie's wife
Larry Drucker, Tobie's nephew

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Note: Recorded at Rice Estate, a "continuing care retirement community," where a variety of background noises are heard throughout the interview.

Begin Recording:

EF: Today's date is December 1st, 2021. We are at Rice Estates at 100 Finley Road, Columbia, South Carolina. My name is Eric Friendly and today I'm speaking with Tobie Drucker. Tobie, can you please spell your name for me?

TD: T-O-B-I-E, initial M for Melvin—M-E-L-V-I-N—Drucker, D-R-U-C-K-E-R.

EF: Okay. Also present is Mr. Drucker's wife, Sarah.

SD: Sarah Samet Drucker. It's S-A-R-A-H S-A-M-E-T D-R-U-C-K-E-R.

EF: And his nephew Larry Drucker.

LD: Hi.

EF: And can you just spell your name?

LD: L-A-R-R-Y D-R-U-C-K-E-R.

EF: Okay. Now that we got that out of the way—

TB: Wait a minute, you've got a middle name, too. Come on. What is it?

LD: Elliot. [Laughter.] E-L-L-I-O-T-T.

EF: All right.

TD: Now it's official. [Laughter.]

EF: Thank you. Okay, so Tobie, if you can just tell me where and when you were born and what are your parents' names?

TD: I was born on December the 20th, 1942, in Denmark, South Carolina, at home. And the doctor was present at my birth. It was late at night.

SD: What was the doctor's name?

TD: Dr. [ed.: sounds like "Lo-man"] was the delivery doctor. What else did you want?

EF: What are your parents' names?

TD: Morris Drucker. And my mother's name is Idabelle—I-D-A-B-E-L-L-E—[ed.: sounds like Andronosky"] Drucker. The reason that Andronosky is A-N-D-R-O-N-S-K-Y, there's some question— My mother was born in Augusta, Georgia. And my father immigrated with his family in—God, what year was that?

LD: 1921.

TD: See, he's got it.

EF: And where did your father immigrate from?

TD: Kobryn. That's the area. Well, there's some question. Larry has a lot of information. The people in Augusta, Georgia that have the history, it shows that a lot of them came from the area —it's like a state or something—of Kobryn.

EF: Kobryn, Russia?

TD: Yeah. It's quite interesting. If you look at that book and see where the majority of the people came from that—immigrated to Augusta in that area, Augusta and McCormick seemed like—Augusta, Georgia, and McCormick, South Carolina—looks like that, for some reason, some of the family already had come over. But some of them went up in McCormick and then they went to Edgefield and then they came to Augusta.

EF: Do you know why your father came to the U.S.?

TD: He was a baby. You got that picture?

LD: Yeah. You saw it.

EF: I've seen it. Yeah.

TD: The baby in there is him.

EF: So what year was he born?

TD: 1902 or something. There's some question if it's 1902 or 1904 or 1906.

EF: So then what year did he get to the U.S.?

TD: Was that 1921?

LD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

EF: And then from there he came to McCormick?

TD: Well, he had a brother who was already in McCormick and was doing well. He sent for some of the others to come back to the people in that picture where he's a little baby boy.

EF: What did he do when he got to McCormick? What was his job?

TD: [Laughing.] His was to be a little boy. [Laughing.] Well, some of them went back and forth to New York. He became a window dresser. You know what a window dresser is? Somebody who used to go around and wherever . . . retail stores would have items for sale, like a

suit. They may have a suit hanging in the window and the shirt hanging somewhere else. But his job was a window dresser, he said, with United Cigar Company. They had narrow little windows to show off the cigars, I guess it was. . . . Larry, do you remember what year he really went to be the baby peddler?

LD: I know he went back and forth. I mean, he came to McCormick and then went back to New York, and then went back to the South again. It was only a few years.

TD: He had a brother, as I said, in McCormick, Hyman Drucker. He had a brother—or a sister, I should say, that was married to Abrom Daitch from Edgefield. But after a couple years they all went to Augusta.

It appears that more [ed.: sounds like "of them"]—McCormick. And there was another, Honea Path. We had a Drucker there that was related, and he had a brother that was the one, Hyman, in Edgefield—*not* Edgefield, *McCormick*. Apparently, he wasn't doing well in New York and he came. His brother-in-law Abrom Daitch loaned him some money to get a horse and wagon. His horse's name was Lou. He said he took better care of Lou than he did himself with the bad weather because Lou did the hard work of pulling him around the area to sell his goods off the wagon. He would spend the night with some of the local farmers so he could be ready to —well, he tried to sell them something as well [laughs]—but that's what he did.

Then eventually, he would go on the weekend to Augusta. There were wholesale merchants in Augusta. It seemed like it was a good many of them, at least from what I could tell from some of the things that we've read over the years. There was at least a half a dozen Jewish wholesale houses that would extend credit to the peddlers.

It was odd, but when you hear the name baby peddler—somebody here recently, maybe two years ago, said to me, they were from Augusta. They said, "Do you know anybody who can tell me what the name baby peddler stood for?" I said, "It's simple. He was the youngest one." They thought he was selling babies. [Laughter.] Really. That's the first time I'd ever heard of such a thing. But anyway,

LD: It's engraved on his—

SD: Headstone.

LD: —grave site.

TD: That's interesting. My mother and her mother and daddy are buried in Augusta cemetery, and my father's mother and daddy are there as well. And the brother Hyman Drucker, he was—what was the right word for him? He was a sport. What would you call him Larry? Apparently, he liked to go fishing and hunting and riding the horse.

SD: Sportsman?

TD: I guess that's a good—he liked it, but apparently, his wife was more interested in him sitting in the store, but he liked going out doing things. One time, I remember being there at the store there in McCormick, and he—it was a two-story store. He and his wife lived up on the second floor. Larry, in the last couple years, was there one time. The people that had the business there today—or two years ago, or whatever it was—said they wanted him to see the safe. They used to put the names o—if somebody bought a safe— You know what I'm talking about? A vault on wheels? When they bought it, they would put their name or the name of the business on the—

SD: Safe.

TD: —on the edge of—like, painted it on there.

LD: This safe's as big as the side of your wall, though. And the second story is like a loft. So his wife, when customers would come, would yell from the front door up, "Hyman! Get up! We've got customers!" [Laughter.]

TD: He apparently did good business because it shows a lot of movement, apparently, to help other Drucker family members come to this country and other relatives.

EF: So what did he sell in his store?

TD: Oh, clothing and shoes and stuff like that.

EF: So after Morris finished peddling goods, what did he do? What did he do after that?

TD: Oh, he found a store. It was for rent and [unintelligible]. But he found it through some salesperson, something. Do you remember, Larry, how he found that?

LD: Mm-mm [negative].

TD: But he opened the store, I think it was 1929, either '28 or '29, which was right at the start of World War II, I guess. Or—let me think.

LD: Definitely a few years before.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: Whatever. He went to Fountain Inn and opened up a store there, and some of the locals told him, in Fountain Inn, that he, in a way, he was going to make it. Because it was trouble getting inventory and stuff like that because of the—oh, it was the Depression. That's what it—it wasn't the—

SD: Depression.

TD: He started at the time when the Depression started. But for some reason, he was able to make it. And he ended up, while he was in Fountain Inn, he married my mother who was living in Augusta and working at one of the wholesale stores. She was like the bookkeeper.

SD: Wasn't she working for Daitch? Wasn't she working at Daitch?

TD: No, that wasn't—she didn't work at Daitch.

SD: Okay.

EF: Do you know how your parents met?

TD: Yeah, he went into the—well, the grandparents lived in Augusta . . . behind her homes, I guess, behind the stores. He saw her, he liked her, and then he [laughs] said—I'm trying to think. He's got the real stuff there. But they got married on the weekend and they went to Fountain Inn. My mother had never been there. He talked about them going to get my mother on the weekend after the wedding. I don't know what kind of wedding they had back then, because they slept behind the store. It was a partition. They did that for a while, maybe a year or two.

Then he rented a house and my sister—the oldest child was my sister. She's just recently passed—Fay Novit Grabin, who was living in—when she got married she was living in Denmark. But when she got married they, of course, went to Charleston where my brother-in-law was in business with his father. . . .

SD: D. J. Novit?

TD: Bernard J. Novit.

EF: So how long did your parents live in Fountain Inn?

TD: It seems like, from what I see, it's about to 1935, I think it was. Do you remember that, Larry?

LD: Something like that, yeah.

TD: About '35. And I often questioned him and my mother, "Why did you leave Fountain Inn? Because in reality, when I first saw it and understood retailing, I went to Fountain Inn. Fountain Inn had more business than Denmark did. He said that he claimed the reason was because he was selling by—what do you call it? Oh, credit sales, they call it, where you'd pay so

much down and pay out over a period of time. He said too much of his money was tied up in it, and there was—oh, what's the right name for them?

SD: Customers weren't paying.

TD: Credit sa—do what?

SD: Customers weren't paying their bills.

TD: Well, credit business. He said the only way he could get away from it was by moving, which it never made any sense to me. . . .

EF: I think they would, once they closed the business, people had a legal obligation to pay their debts. I think that may have been the reason why, possibly. I saw a merchant who lived in Camden. He sold on credit, and when he closed his business, he put an ad out and in the newspaper saying that everyone who owes him has to pay him, legally.

TD: If they could or would.

EF: I guess, yeah.

TD: He had heard about a location in Denmark from a salesman, that there was an empty store building there in Denmark. It used to be a retail store and it was for rent. So he went and looked at it and then he liked it. He said, "Well, I guess I'll move." And it talked about—I forget how many trucks of merchandise and fixtures, like four or five trucks. They came there on a Sunday, I think, with the trucks. They were open tops, so he had tarps he covered them up with. He had—it took all kind of stuff. But he liked Denmark. Of course, you can see from 1935, approximately, to—when did he pass away, Larry?

LD: The '90s.

TD: So anyway, that was—

LD: 1992.

EF: So going back to your birth, was the doctor who delivered you, was he Jewish?

TD: Wait a minute. Say that again.

EF: Going back to your birth, was the doctor who delivered you Jewish?

TD: No. No, but he was a good guy. I got to know him when, occasionally, I had to have a doctor's report when I was going off to college. He had his office in Denmark, but you had to walk about twenty steps up the stairs to his office, and his office had that smell of—what do you call it? A lot of doctor's offices back then used to have that smell—*ether*.

SD: Ether?

TD: Ether, the gas. . . . Ether.

LD: Well, tell him how you were delivered. [Laughter.]

TD: I was there!

LD: Yeah.

SD: You were delivered at home. [Laughter.]

LD: What does at home mean, though?

TD: What do you mean?

SD: Wait a minute. I—

LD: It's a lot different than it is today, so were you delivered—

TD: I was delivered at home.

SD: But not in the house that I know. The one that you were born in was on the highway to—

TD: I was the last of five children to be born. My brother Meyer and brother Herb and myself were born at home. My brother Ted was born in Augusta, I believe. I know Fay, my sister, was born in the hospital, because my mother's mother insisted that since it was her first child that she wanted her to be born in the hospital, where we can make sure, because she had issues with losing babies. My mother was the only one that—well, was another child, a daughter, who lived to be about twelve years old. What was the—

LD: Frieda.

TD: I mean, what was the cause of death? Wasn't it something to do with—

LD: Said influenza.

TD: Influenza. It took out a lot of them. My mother was the only one that lived past twelve years old. I didn't know any of my grandparents. They were all dead before I was born. [Sound in the background of warning beeps heard when a truck is backing up.] But my sister remembers; she was about twelve. She remembers me being born and how they told her to help the doctor with getting hot towels and stuff, and making [unintelligible]. She said she never had known anything about people shaking from being so scared. She was so scared, she said, because it was late at night in a little four-room house with seven people living in it. *Then* it was six. Then of course, I was born. My sister always said she wanted a little sister.

SD: Sister.

TD: But she said when I came, she said, "Oh, it's only had another little stinker." She was talking about—because she had to help change the diapers and stuff, [unintelligible], the cloth diapers. But she changed her mind after she really got to know me.

SD: Yeah, she and Tobie were very close.

TD: She would use us as dolls. [Laughter.]

LD: Apparently, a few days [unintelligible] Honea Path with The Fair. Did you ever hear that? That The Fair was what Hyman called his shop at first?

TD: What was the name?

LD: The Fair?

TD: Yeah.

SD: [Unintelligible; crosstalk 00:23:35.]

TD: That's one of the names he—

LD: He started in Honea Path and moved to McCormick?

TD: I don't know that. I really don't know that. That's some of the mystery.

LD: But then, too—*oh.* So it lists Honea Path *and* McCormick.

TD: He helped give jobs to some of the people that were cousins, relatives somehow, and that was typical. The one that remains is a Cohen, C-O-H-E-N. Is there anything about him in there? He was like a manager for him, and he ended up buying that store, apparently, because over the

years, several times when I went to Honea Path. He had a store and he ca—I forget what the name he called that store. I'm talking about the Cohen fellow.

And there was another guy that I knew that had a store there. I don't know if one took it over from the other one. I'm trying to remember, what was that guy's name?

SD: It'll come to you later.

TD: He became, I remember, a Karsch. K-A-R-S-C-H, [ed.: pronounced by Tobie as "kersh"] was somebody that Hymie Drucker did some business with. But he ended up moving to Clover, South Carolina.

SD: Who moved to Clover, Tobie?

TD: Karsch.

SD: Oh, okay.

EF: When you were growing up in Denmark, do you remember any other Jewish families there?

TD: Yeah. Ness, N-E-S-S. Morris Ness, that was the father. The son's name was—oh, gosh—Harold Ness. He had a store there, and he sold higher-end merchandise than my father did. He's still alive. He's ninety-something years old. He's in a nursing home there, somewhere in the lower part of the state.

EF: And so that was the only other family?

TD: Well, I talked to some people that had lived there, Jewish people that lived there—Bogen. Have you heard that name?

EF: Yeah, I've heard of them.

TD: Bogen, and what is it? I'm trying to think who it was. Well, for a short time, a guy named Silver lived there, too.

EF: Silva, S-I-L-V-A?

TD: V-E-R.

EF: V-E-R?

TD: Yeah. And there's that picture, on the front, the one with him and the baby.

LD: Yeah, we talked about this one. It's funny here, it says here—

TD: Where did you—

LD: "Hyman gave Morris a job working in his store. Eventually Hyman opened another store in Honea Path. Morris ran the store for Hyman. Hyman lost the store in Honea Path for a time. Morris went to work for Morris Drucker in Denmark."

TD: [Laughing.] Yeah.

LD: Yeah?

TD: Yeah.

LD: So two Morris Druckers were in Denmark at one time?

TD: Yeah, at one time.

LD: And then Morris eventually opened up another store in Westminster and settled down with his wife, Faye, to start a family there."

TD: No, that Morris Drucker and his wife, I knew. As a boy, they would come occasionally to Denmark to visit on their way to Savannah. And he ended up with a store in Savannah, the cousin Morris.

EF: What synagogue did your family belong to?

TD: None.

EF: None?

TD: None.

EF: Did you have any Jewish education?

TD: None.

EF: Okay.

TD: Except what was going on for the holidays. We wouldn't go to the store, but we wouldn't go to the synagogue either.

SD: And didn't your aunt want you to come to Augusta?

TD: Several of the relatives on my father's side wanted him to get us to Augusta to study—

SD: Hebrew.

TD: —Jewish education. But he said, "I don't need your help." He was tough. He wanted it his way—

SD: Oh, he *was* tough.

TD: —and he didn't want to be told any other way.

LD: This was the Daitch who were asking?

TD: Yeah.

LD: [Ed.: sounds like "Rifkee Ruchels," likely referring to Abrom's wife Rebecca (Rifke Rachel) Drucker]? Abrom Daitch?

TD: Yes.

LD: Okay.

TD: And their daughter—

SD: Esther Berger?

TD: —Esther Berger.

EF: So then you worked in your father's store?

TD: I'm sorry.

EF: You worked in your father's store?

TD: Oh, yeah. It was a requirement.

SD: No, no. You worked in your father's store. Herb was able to go play baseball a little bit.

TD: Well, Herb liked doing things athletic. He and my father clashed on that.

SD: *Oh, yeah.*

TD: Herb could have been a good athlete if—his daddy I'm talking about, Herb, Larry's daddy. Herb, really, he would have made a good baseball player because he loved it. He was good at it.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: He could hit that ball. The other teams didn't like him because they knew he scored. [Laughter.] One of them—one time they went to a game in Bamberg he was playing, and a guy came up to him and told him, "You better not hit that ball. If you do, we're going to get you on your way out of here."

SD: Well, he hit the ball.

TD: [Unintelligible] the coach heard it and nothing happened. . . .

EF: So did your family keep kosher?

TD: Kosher style. We didn't get the kosher meat.

SD: But you didn't mix milk and meat.

TD: Well, we pretended it was kosher style. How about that?

EF: So there was no kosher butcher?

TD: In Augusta there was.

EF: In Augusta, but not—

TD: And Columbia. But not in Denmark. It couldn't have survived.

EF: Right.

TD: Two families?

EF: Yeah. That's not enough. [Laughter.]

TD: No, but I'm sure that was a common question.

EF: Where did you go to school for primary school and high school?

TD: Denmark, and then Denmark and Olar consolidated schools, and from 1956, I think it was, they consolidated schools, and I was in one of the first classes that actually had Denmark and Olar students combined. And the interesting part, too, there was a store in Olar, South Carolina, run by a Jewish merchant, Jake Pearlstine. He had only one child, a daughter who was married to—what was the guy's name?

SD: Ben Pearlstine?

TD: No.

SD: Oh—I can *see* him. I can see his face.

EF: So what kind of store was it—did he run?

TD: What kind of store did the gentleman run?

EF: Pearlstine, yeah.

TD: Clothing and shoes. He carried a nice line of stuff, more expensive than what my father carried. My father was on the low end and he was in the middle—Pearlstine. Oh, what's the name of that store? And Sumter. Did you interview anybody from Sumter? The Jewish people from Sumter?

EF: I think we have a few, yeah. I haven't done them personally, though.

TD: Did you have a list of those?

EF: Not with me right now, but—

TD: Well, because there's a family that lived there that did real well. His daughter married into that family. . . . But anyway, go ahead. Maybe it'll come to me.

EF: What were your hobbies and interests as a child?

TD: Food.

EF: Food?

TD: And clothes. [Laughter.] And what I could play. When I got to realize what my father's business was, he had already had us there sweeping the floors and doing stuff with—

SD: Dusting the boxes.

TD: Yeah. We had to dust the boxes, the top and bottom of the boxes, and Herb didn't like that at all. That was not—

SD: [Laughing.] Did you?

TD: No, I didn't. But Herb rebelled.

LD: How old were you when you first worked in the store?

TD: Nine or ten. He would get us down to the store after hours and help. I had to crawl in the window to get the—we called it dressing the window, changing the displays and all. But then on Saturdays, [ed.: sounds like "at"] first exposure to movies was—since he had five children and, at the time, three of them were still there. So he didn't need us except on holidays when they were kind of busy. He did a lot of pointing his finger and knocking on the glass to show me where he wanted me to put a pair of shoes or a shirt in the window.

But then I was going to tell you, he ended up letting us go to the movie. It was a nice theater there. It was built in my time and it was a nice place. Of course, it was segregated. The African Americans could only go and sit on the balcony above. . . .

SD: And your father actually gave you money to go to the movies.

TD: It cost ten cents to go and ten cents he gave us to buy a piece of some candy. But then as things went along, my brother Ted was in the Korean War, which was in 1952, '53, somewhere in there. My sister got married, and my brother Meyer went off to school in 1955.

EF: What school did he go to?

TD: USC [University of South Carolina].

SD: Wait, wasn't he in the army first?

TD: He got into the reserves so he could get benefits, military benefits. They helped pay his way through school, through college, I should say.

EF: So did any of your family serve in World War II?

TD: . . . . No, the Korean War.

EF: The Korean War. Okay.

TD: Ted served in the Korean War. He was actually a prisoner—not a prisoner. He was actually a—

SD: Medic?

TD: A medic in a camp. What kind of camp?

SD: Prisoner of war camp?

TD: Yeah. POW camp of Koreans. So I ended up catching more—excuse me—doing more in the store than any of the others did. I don't know. Maybe Fay did more because she worked there. She graduated in what year? Didn't you have that diploma, that wooden diploma? It's got the time when she was—

LD: My phone's off, though.

TD: [Laughs.] Okay. She worked in the store. Back then it was only eleven grades. So she—

SD: She went to eleventh grade and you went to the twelfth grade, right?

TD: Yeah. But Ted had to go to the twelfth grade, too.

SD: Okay.

TD: My brother Ted and my sister, Fay, were—

SD: A year apart.

TD: Were born exactly one year apart of each other, on Thanksgiving day. Now, what are the odds of that? . . . One born in one year, the next one born on the *same day.* [Unintelligible; crosstalk 00:38:11.]

SD: Somebody worked it out. [Laughter.]

EF: Going back to segregation in Denmark. How would you describe that during that time? Did you ever see any violence regarding segregation?

TD: No, none. Well, I saw—somebody burned—I saw where they had burned a cross about two blocks away from where I lived.

SD: Wasn't it in a church?

TD: Yeah. It was in a Church of God church.

EF: So then that was the Ku Klux Klan?

TD: Yeah. They built a wooden cross and burned it.

EF: Did you ever feel threatened by any of that?

TD: No. My father, he had a good rapport with the chief of police. The chief came by early that afternoon and said to my father, "Y'all need to go home and stay home because they're going to do a march," burning a cross, whatever they told him. And he said, "Cut off all the lights in your house," so we did. The next morning we were walking to school and, of course, our curiosity was, "What did they do there that night?" Well, you could see the ashes of the wooden cross burned and that was extent of that.

Of course, over the years of being there—look, I was number five. They made it easier for me, dealing with these issues. My father, he was a tough guy, and they knew it. He did the best in his own mind to take care of us, he did. There were a lot of people living a lot worse than we were.

SD: He made sure you had clothes and food.

EF: So I guess this kind of ties into the—

TD: The what?

EF: I guess this kind of ties into the, I guess, discriminatory elements of the KKK. But do you feel like only a certain type of person would shop in your father's store?

TD: Yeah. Well, Meyer, my brother Meyer, who was the middle child, says he remembers seeing Ku Klux Klan members marching down Main Street. I don't remember that. I remember burning the cross and not *seeing* them do it, but seeing the results of it. Like I said, the chief of police told my father, "You take your family and cut off all the lights and don't go outside. Everything will be right." He'll take care of it. And he did it.

See, one of the problems–the people in Denmark paid attention to my father because he voted. He and my mother both voted. Of course, she was a native American—

SD: She was born here. She was born in Augusta.

TD: —but my father was born in Kobryn.

SD: Russia.

EF: Yeah. Okay.

TD: I'm trying to think—

EF: So why did you come to Columbia?

TD: To go to Carolina.

EF: And what year was that?

TD: 1960. My brother Ted, as I said, was in the Korean War, and he got army benefits. So he had tuition paid by—as long as he made decent grades—he had tuition paid by the government. So by the time he came back from the military, shortly, he was going to [University of South] Carolina himself. So he set the path for the rest of us, except for my sister, to go to college. We worked our way through.

EF: So where did you work at?

TD: At first I worked in the cafeteria in the Russell House. I'm sure you know where the Russell House is.

EF: Yeah, yeah.

TD: So I worked washing dishes to begin with. I washed more dishes than most people wash in a lifetime. I did it in two years.

SD: And what did your—

TD: But that got too difficult, going to school and working, and paying it all my own way. But my brother Ted, if he hadn't gone to the military and got that information and went on to get his degree in accounting, I don't think we would've gone to college, because he led the way, he encouraged us.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

EF: What did you do after you worked as a dishwasher?

TD: [Laughs.] I went from the dishwasher to serving food on the line there in the cafeteria to going into the bakery and helping them. I'd get up, be in the bakery of the Russell House, I'd be there at five o'clock in the morning before classes, and helping bake different things, cakes. They

had a real bakery. I mean that was a—the baker himself was kind of creative. He had a lot of his own recipes. He did [unintelligible].

Then I made up my mind that it was too tough to do that way. So I found a—what do you call it?—a commercial college. Are you familiar with what a commercial college is? One that teaches commercial courses like—

SD: Business.

TD: —business, math, accounting, and different things. It was a two-year degree. So I got that two-year degree. But I worked there, and I was still working a little bit in the cafeteria and I saw, I knew I couldn't do that still. So I talked to the people at the commercial school. Did they have any people they knew that would hire students part time? I started working in the men's store, Edward's Men's Shop. It was on the corner of—

EF: Washington and Assembly? Washington and Assembly?

TD: Not Washington. *Yeah.* Washington and Assembly, right. It was on the corner.

EF: I researched that recently. [Laughs.] [Unintelligible.]

TD: There was a lot of activity back then on Assembly Street.

SD: *Mm-hmm* [affirmative].

TD: Customers were just—on Friday and Saturday, you had to be careful where you were. Not that they would do anything to you, but just you felt threatened a little bit. Most of the business back then, a lot of it was the African American clientele. But they were welcome in any of those stores, the Jewish-owned stores. They called it the Jew Store. You don't need to put that in there. [Laughter.] I don't want to stir up anything.

SD: Mm-mm [negative].

TD: There's a book called *The Jew Store*. Have you ever read it?

EF: I haven't, no.

TD: About this area. Some of the Bogen family, and some others were in that book.

EF: So Edward's eventually moved to Main Street.

TD: Right.

EF: So did you work in the Main Street store as well?

TD: Yeah, I was still working there when they closed Edward's Men's Shop and opened that — [machinery noise in the background]

SD: Mark's?

EF: Mark's.

TD: Mark's. Yeah, Mark's, which was—it used to be a theater was there before Mark's. I remember there was a pawn shop there. I had some disagreement with the man that owned Edward's. [Laughs.] It was a holiday, one of the Jewish holidays, and I wanted to—somebody had invited me to come have dinner with them before the—

SD: Services.

TD: —before the services [loud machinery noise; inaudible 00:48:09]. They were going to come pick me up. That was supposed to happen at five o'clock, before the service. I'm trying to think, the service was probably seven or eight. But he said, "No, I'm not going to let you off, because you said you'd work anytime I needed you, and I need you."

EF: Well, he was Jewish, too, wasn't he? He was also Jewish wasn't he?

TD: Yeah! He was treasurer of the synagogue.

EF: Oh, wow.

TD: Or financial secretary, one of them. He dealt with the money.

EF: Okay.

TD: I worked there about a year and a half. It was good for me, because I learned how to do a different version of retail than my father did. So I told him, I said, "I guess I'll have to quit."

EF: Right.

TD: I said, "How much time you need to"—whatever it was, a week or two weeks. I said, "Okay." I said, "I'm still going to have dinner with these people." The guy who came by to pick me up was somebody he knew. He tried to act like he wanted to wait on him. He knew the guy wouldn't buy anything. He didn't buy the styles that he carried. He carried high style. Do you understand what high style is?

EF: Yeah.

TD: Okay. So anyway, one day right after the holiday was over with, I started looking around and I saw Moe Levy's. I said, "Oh, I heard some salesman talk about Moe Levy's." When they would come to see my father to try to sell him something. Somehow we'd get around to talking about other stores. They said, "Well, that's a good store to go to work for." So I went and talked to the fellow, son-in-law, Harold Rittenberg. I told him what I was looking for. He said, "Well, I can use you."

Part-time then was forty hours [laughter] in those stores. Sometimes forty-five hours was part-time! I was staying at the YMCA, which is where it is today.

EF: Mm-hmm [affirmative], on Sumter Street.

TD: Yeah, right by the church. They used to have dormitory rooms up there that they would rent out by the week. So that sounded good because of the fact I'd be right in the middle of where that commercial college was.

SD: Palmer.

TD: Between the working—where I would work at Moe Levy's and going to college. So anyway.

EF: What was the commercial college called?

TD: Palmer College, P-A-L-M-E-R. They were on the 1700 block of Laurel Street.

EF: So did you like working at Moe Levy's? Did you like working at Moe Levy's?

TD: I didn't even know her. [Laughter.] I didn't know her. She—

SD: He didn't know me then.

EF: Oh, okay.

TD: She grew up in High Point, North Carolina.

EF: So when did you guys meet?

TD: We met on a blind date.

SD: The story was, my aunt called my mother and says, “I met this *really nice* young man. I think Sarah should come down and date him.” I’m going, “Oh, *God!* Not mother’s family, *too!”* Because Daddy’s family had a matchmaker also. But to—

TD: They called them matchmaker [unintelligible].

SD: But to appease Aunt Tillie I came down and I met him. My cousin Richard said, “When he walked in and said, ‘Hello, I’m Tobie,’ something happened.” We both got hit over the head with a bow and arrow [laughing], I guess.

TD: She’s using a figure of speech.

SD: And—

TD: So anyway, let’s get back to—I worked there in Moe Levy’s right then a little over two years, and got my degree, associate degree. [Ed.: sounds like “That’s what it was.”] It was a pleasure. It was a pleasure working at Edward’s Men’s Shop. They were always nice to me, except for that—

SD: One incident.

TD: —that incident. Now, Edward’s Men’s Shop, the man that owned it was Arnold Rivkin. He—

SD: Didn’t his mother work there, too?

TD: I was going to say, his mother, his wife, his children. He had three children; they were working there, too. He had a good business at Edward’s Men’s Shop. But Moe Levy’s had even a better business. Because you didn’t have the dealing with the different styles and [ed.: sounds like “jive”] and not [unintelligible]. He had a good trade at Edward’s *and* Mark’s, but Moe Levy’s was in business in 1920. Can you imagine, it was a hundred years old?

SD: Can you imagine working for Mrs. Levy? [Laughing.]

TD: Well, anyway.

SD: She was a force to be reckoned with. [Laughter.]

TD: I got along with all of them, except for that one issue. I never had any problem with any of the other—I didn’t have that many other jobs, I had about three jobs all together.

EF: Do you remember any other merchants on Assembly Street?

TD: I knew them all. Well, when I say I knew them all, I knew them all in my lifetime.

SD: Jack Krugman.

TD: Square Deal Jack's. You ever heard of that?

EF: Square Deal Jack's?

TD: Yeah.

EF: I never heard [unintelligible; crosstalk 00:54:33].

TD: Jack Krugman, he was the owner. He had a store in the 1400 block of Assembly Street. Do you want more information about the Jewish merchants?

EF: Just in Columbia, yeah. That'd be great. If you can remember any of them.

TD: No, but what I was going to tell you, if you get the Columbia Jewish—not Columbia. What is it? Beth Shalom Synagogue's history—

EF: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: —it's got the whole in [unintelligible; crosstalk 00:55:08].

SD: It's got it all in there.

TD: I helped put that together because I knew so many of the people.

EF: Right.

TD: I got a few of the other people that I knew, that would help me with ones I didn't know. But most of them, I knew most of the merchants—the pawn shops, the army store—

SD: How did you meet Gus Oppenheimer?

TD: Just seeing him on the street.

SD: Oh, okay.

TD: This guy, Gus Oppenheimer, was a survivor of World War II. He had a big Russian accent [ed.: making a throaty sound, twice, like "Hah"]. [Laughs.] It's got a certain sound to it.

EF: So in the Jewish community in Columbia, would you describe it as close?

TD: Yes.

EF: It was very clo—[unintelligible; crosstalk]—

TD: When they needed to be close, they were close. Now, they may not have been so close individually with competitors.

EF: Right.

TD: But as far as dealing with the Jewish families and friends and stuff, you could count on most of them. At least I found that to be the case for *me* as I got to know, working at Moe Levy's *and* at Edward's Men's Shop. I really got to know all—that gave me a foot in the door, I call it, to being inside the Jewish community, which is where I wanted to be.

I started going to the synagogue on [unintelligible]—

SD: High Holidays.

TD: —Beth Shalom and—

SD: Tree of Life.

TD: —Tree of Life. I got to know a lot of the people.

SD: When I met you, you were a member of the Tree of Life.

TD: But anyway, what else you want to know? If you want, like I said, that list of the stores, retail stores and businesses, it's in that book.

EF: Okay. Yeah. How would you say that non-Jews would've described Columbia's Jewish population?

TD: Say it again.

EF: How would you say that non-Jews would have described Columbia's Jewish population?

TD: Well, I think most of the time the Jewish community was welcomed into the general community. Because the businesses they—these people had various businesses, like Moe Levy's. You could go there and buy almost anything. It wasn't what it was in the recent years, but years

ago, their slogan was "headquarters for most things." 1920—can you imagine coming to Columbia with a family? It just—

The people in Augusta, Georgia—I just was reading their book—how many of them are from, I guess you call it a neighborhood—I don't know—of Kobryn. A good part of the ones in Columbia were also. But they weren't as friendly with each other after they got here. I don't know what happened. I didn't realize for a long time that Moe Levy, he came from Kobryn.

EF: How do you feel that Columbia's Jewish community has changed over the years? If at all?

TD: Oh, I think it's changed. I think more of the community became professionals and got away from the retail. They got into something that didn't take quite as much of their time and they were able to get a good living. We get a good living out of the retail business.

EF: Do you two have children?

TD: Yes. We had three children. We lost our other son, who was the oldest. He was in his mid-forties. He was about the size of Larry.

LD: Not quite [unintelligible].

SD: He wasn't as tall as Larry.

TD: Now they—

SD: He was six-one

TD: —they were first cousins.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

EF: So what are your children's professions?

TD: Well, Robin is a schoolteacher. Katie—what would you say she does?

LD: An online entrepreneur.

SD: Yeah, that's a good description! [Laughter.] If you want something done you call Katie.

TD: With all the going-ons with the epidemic and stuff, she loved being at home because she's got two children. One's four and one's one and a half. They live in Cincinnati, Ohio.

SD: How do you get one and a half? She'll be two on the nineteenth of this month.

TD: Oh, our son's name was Charles.

LD: What did he do?

TD: What did he do?

LD: What was his job?

TD: What did Charles do?

SD: [Laughs.] God, what *did* he do?

TD: He liked fooling with gadgets.

SD: And drama.

TD: His degree was in drama from the University of South Carolina.

LD: But he was in retail, too, for a long time.

TD: Yeah, he was in retail most of the time. Besides, drama, he wanted it to be a profession, but it's not a . . . he had a job being a professional. It paid fifteen thousand dollars a year.

LD: Theater production.

TD: He'd build sets and all kinds of stuff. He could do all kind of things. He was like Larry and myself, he liked people.

LD: But he was selling merchandise for the University of Alabama, wasn't he?

TD: Yeah, one of his jobs was . . . I think it was a company that contracted with—

LD: Right.

TD: —the University of Alabama. But he got the merchandise. He helped get it designed and approved by the athletic department and other stuff like that. He had to find the merchandise. He had to make it or see it through being made. But he loved people. And he loved his Gamecocks.

EF: But he worked for Alabama? [Laughter.]

TD: He did not like Alabama even though he got a second degree from Alabama in computer science.

EF: After you left Moe Levy's, did you open your own store?

TD: Actually, what I did was there was a store called Columbia Shoe Fair. It was next to Star Music. The man that had it passed away and I went to—

EF: What was his name?

TD: What was his name? Love, Bob Love. Robert Love, Columbia Shoe Fair. I'm trying to remember what the number was. It was in the 1300 block, I can't remember if it was 1320 or what.

EF: Okay. So you bought that business from his estate?

TD: Yes. Well, I had to borrow money. That was a big problem. Right then, like it is now, the economy wasn't—the time I bought it, within couple of months it started going down and it went down and I went down with it.

EF: What year did you buy the shoe store?

TD: Sarah might remember. It's in the 1980-something. But anyway, we did good for about the first year and a half. Then, like I said, the semi-depression came. Sarah—

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: What was the question you wanted?

EF: What year did he buy the Columbia Shoe Fair?

TD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SD: Ahhh, 197—hmm, '72, I think.

TD: No.

SD: Wasn't '69.

TD: No, it was probably in the early '70s. It could have been '73. You may have it somewhere. I probably have it somewhere.

SD: Yeah.

TD: I got in my head, but I can't get it out. I can't generate it.

SD: It'll come to him in a minute.

TD: Well, anyway, go ahead.

EF: What kind of clients shopped at that store?

TD: African Americans, mainly.

SD: You mean at Columbia Shoe Fair?

TD: Yeah.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

EF: So what year did it close? What year did you close it? Or around what year?

SD: You didn't close it; you sold it to Fairchild.

TD: Well, I closed it and then this guy that I knew, he wanted to buy it and start from scratch. So I sold it to him for about fifteen hundred dollars, just to get for the equipment. Because I had a big sale we put on to go out of business.

EF: What'd you do after that?

TD: Well, when I was closing it up, one of the suppliers called me up and said, "He wanted to talk to me, see if I wanted to become a salesman to represent him in part of North Carolina and part of South Carolina as a salesman." The part that I didn't like about it was being out and a lack of money to be out and travel. Even though gasoline wasn't that high, still, sometimes I had to be out with hotels and motels.

SD: You were usually out Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

TD: See, she remembers. What year was that?

SD: Katie was a baby.

TD: Okay.

EF: So you were a traveling salesman?

TD: Yeah, for about a year there.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: What happened was, I saw where I was breaking even, but I needed to be making money to support my family. So I needed to make additional funds to pay for traveling and be not in the hole all the time. So I told—it was brother-in-laws, I should say, that owned the business. One of them was a jerk and the other one was just a fine gentleman. He was a good guy.

One day I called over there and the jerk answered the phone. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm working. I need some information." But I said, "I also need to talk to you about how you draw." They used to give what you call a draw, like a hundred dollars a week. It wasn't enough for a family to live on. So anyway, I told him, the guy, the jerk, I said, "I need to talk to y'all." He said, "Well, if you don't like it, you can just leave." They had the office in Atlanta. So I said, "Well, maybe I will." So I went to see one of the clients, and I had my son with me because it was right around Christmastime. I sold the guy a good many shoes. I came to the house and Charles said, "Mama, Daddy quit his job."

SD: Yeah. I loved hearing that. Mm-hmm.

TD: So that was that job. Then I started buying, selling stuff, going to garage sales and doing things like that. I was able to make as much money as I was traveling on the road all the time. I'd go to auctions. Back then they had more auctions and had weekly and daily auctions in different places in South Carolina. But that wasn't stable enough. I mean, I never knew what I was going to be getting. So anyway, I went to back to Moe Levy's and asked him could he hire me or would he hire me. He did. He said yeah.

EF: What year was that?

TD: Somewhere I got it written down. They hired me right away. I worked there for a total—while I was in college and working over there, I put in eight and a half years there. I was one of the first ones they had that worked as hard as I did, I'll tell you that.

SD: [Laughs.] Yeah, didn't somebody tell you not to work so hard?

TD: That was in the cafeteria.

SD: Oh.

TD: Until they died, I had a good rapport with the Levy family.

SD: You still have a good rapport with them.

TD: They're dead, Sarah, except for—

SD: Well, Gloria, you still—

TD: Well, okay.

SD: Harold just recently died.

TD: Anyway, it was like a family.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: They treated me fine and I treated them extra fine. I did whatever it took to keep them happy.

SD: Yeah. You would've thought that Charles was one of Mrs. Levy's [laughs] grandchildren.

TD: I'm trying to think what else.

EF: You told me on the phone that you owned a store called Sunshine's.

TD: Oh yeah!

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: On Farrow Road. 3501 Farrow Road. We bought out the man—he had, like, a semi-wholesale-retail business of clothing—

SD: Jeff Sunshine.

TD: —of clothing and shoes.

SD: Jeff Sunshine?

TD: Yeah, Sarah. The problem he had was where the location was. It was not good for non–African American and other minorities. It's just the neighborhood. Now it's worse than it was when we were there. But with Sarah's help, we ran that store for twenty-two and a half years.

EF: So you opened it in the late eighties?

TD: Yeah. I didn't have the money to buy it with, but I had a friend who told me that if I found a deal, he'd put up the money, he'd loan me the money, and he and I would be partners in the business—to buy it and liquidate it so I could have a bank roll. So we did that. He and I stayed together maybe six months. I liked having him there because he had a good sense of humor and he knew how to talk to people.

SD: And he liked the pantyhose. [Laughing.]

EF: And what was his name?

TD: He had so much inventory in that store.

EF: That was Jeff Sunshine?

TD: Yeah.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

EF: So he worked with you when you guys first started out.

TD: The first three or four years. Not years, *months.* I think we bought it in late October and he wanted out maybe March or April. So we were able to do that. I made good enough money to be able to buy it without borrowing any money. Because of him. He was a good guy, he was my buddy.

But anyway, first we were going to eliminate the entire inventory and get out of there. When we sold down to a certain level, he said, "Come on, either you buy me out, or I'll buy you out." He said, "But I think you ought to stay here." So that's what I did. We made sure we were able to send three children through college—

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: —because of him.

SD: And because of Murray.

TD: Yeah. And there were times when he would—after I bought it, if I needed to go out of town or anything, all I had to do was call him. He'd come run the store for me for a day or two. He didn't care for it. He was a gambler. He took people to Las Vegas and Atlantic City and all the gambling. [Unintelligible; crosstalk 01:15:49]—

SD: He wanted Tobie to go on a junket. Tobie says, "I don't have the money." [Laughing.]

TD: He was [unintelligible], too.

EF: Oh, so he was Jewish, too?

TD: Yeah.

SD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TD: The family, I could call them today and they'd do anything they could to help me. Because I was the same way. They used to tell me, "Why can't you get Murray to do this and do that?" And I said, "Because if he wanted me to do it, he'd ask me to do it, and I'd do it for him." We did all kind of things related to retail and the store.

SD: He was a good guy.

TD: Couldn't have been any better. Some people told me they didn't know how I got along with him.

SD: It was very easy. He was very easy to get along with.

TD: He was a little gruff.

SD: Well, not with you.

TD: If you can imagine what gruff means. Not rough, but gruff. [Laughter.] He *loved* to talk. Not that I don't. [Laughter.] He would just—

EF: So you sold clothes at that store?

TD: We sold anything I could buy.

EF: So it was just like a general store?

TD: Mainly we sold clothes and shoes. But if I had some canned food—one time I bought a bunch of stuff like that—groceries.

SD: He helped a lot of the—

TD: Let me ask you something, how much—I'm not cutting you off?

EF: No, no.

TD: How much time do you have?

EF: Let's see what we're at. We're at an hour and twenty-two minutes. I think I only have a couple more questions here, so we're getting close.

TD: It's getting close to lunchtime, but she'll tell them to hold it. Just go tell them to hold it, Sarah.

SD: Yes, sir.

EF: I think I have, like, fifteen more minutes.

TD: No, let's tell them thirty minutes.

SD: Okay.

TD: Anyway, go ahead. [Sounds of a door opening and closing.]

EF: How do you remember Columbia and why?

TD: I don't remember Co—

EF: Do you remember it as, like, a welcoming place or in between? Or do you feel like you weren't welcome here?

TD: Oh, I was welcome here. I think a lot of it had to do with—if you're talking about in relation to the Jewish community, I was the president of the synagogue at one time.

EF: Of Beth Shalom?

TD: Yeah, back about ten years ago, I was on the congregation—I was working at Sunshine's and they wanted me to be president. Actually, first they wanted me to be financial secretary and then treasurer and then president. But things happened with the office of the synagogue. How about cut it off just for a minute so I can tell you what it's about.

[Recording paused.]

TD: I don't want you to do anything about it. I don't want you to write anything about it until I find out if the board—

EF: All right. How about we talk about it after. I don't want to stop this just in case, but we can talk about it afterwards. [Sounds of a door opening and closing.]

TD: Okay.

LD: I'm wondering what opened the door for you to be successful here in Columbia after coming up from Denmark?

TD: I was lucky. I ran into people that—I worked hard in the cafeteria, and that led me to know I wasn't interested in staying, working in the cafeteria. I asked them would they make me a manager-trainee after I was there about a year in the cafeteria. "No, you are going to leave us. If you get your degree, you'll leave us." I said, "No I won't." I said, "I'll stay working for you." But they didn't see the same thing I did.

LD: So who was the person you met that really opened up Columbia to you? Because I mean, you're coming from—had you visited Columbia a bunch from Denmark?

TD: No, not a bunch. A little bit. I went with my father—well, when my sister got married, they had the wedding here at the Wade Hampton Hotel, which is on the corner of Ger—*was* on the corner—

SD: *Was* on the corner.

TD: —of Gervais and Main Street.

LD: Was there a particular person in the family that you had already known?

TD: I think the deal with Arnold Rivkin—seeing that you could run a nice clean operation. He had a clean business, he really did.

LD: I mean, did you just walk into his store and introduce yourself? Was there a card on a bulletin board?

TD: The guy at Palmer College, he was supposed to help me find a job. That was one of the things they told me when I entered the school. I met a few different people, but to get to the Jewish community is because I've worked with Arnold Rivkin and Moe Levy's. I'm convinced of that. Particularly, Arnold Rivkin, he really did. Even though he didn't come to the shul frequently because he had his store he was running, he was doing work for the other synagogue by looking after the treasury. And at Moe Levy's, Harold Rittenberg, he also did the same thing a couple years later.

SD: At Beth Shalom.

TD: So I got to know their families. I knew that Arnold Rivkin, he tried to apologize to me for not understanding that I wanted to go be with family or friends or somebody doing the Jewish holidays. Well, Moe Levy's, there was never any question.

LD: Did they shut down for Passover, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah?

TD: Well, major holidays, they closed, the doors were closed. And Mark's and Edward's, they closed for the holidays, too. Working at Moe Levy's, they had so many people—part-time students and stuff—working, that one person wasn't a big deal for them to let go if they had to go to a doctor, if they had to go to see the child being born or whatever. I guess Assembly Street really—it took me past Denmark, seeing that you could do small things and still be very successful by getting involved.

LD: With the community itself.

TD: With the community. My father, he was connected by voting. He considered that—and a few things. He wasn't mean to people; he was just tough. You saw that picture of him. When he came to this country, what was he? Two years old?

LD: He was fifteen when he came to the United States.

TD: And that picture was made—

LD: That was made in the Old Country. That's my question. In Denmark, did Zayde shut down on the Sabbath? Did he shut down on Jewish holidays?

TD: Some.

LD: Some.

TD: If it was on a Saturday, he would, most of the time, open back up. He closed down on Friday and opened back up on Saturday around five or six o'clock.

LD: And for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?

TD: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.

LD: He shut down then, too?

TD: Well, he would shut down enough to know that we weren't going to the store or to school. It would depend on which holiday we were dealing with.

LD: And how did the town people react to that in Denmark?

TD: They never said a word about it. Not to me. Well, don't forget, I wasn't spokesman for the Morris Drucker family. Morris Drucker was. [Laughs.] He was [unintelligible; crosstalk 01:25:19]—

LD: [Unintelligible; crosstalk 01:25:19] went to school, did the schoolkids, the gentiles, comment?

TD: Oh, yeah.

LD: What did they say?

TD: "Hey, Jew."

LD: Oh, they did?

TD: Oh, yeah.

EF: So you did face discrimination?

TD: Oh yeah. Not as much, because I was lucky. My sister and three brothers were ahead of me. They took the stuff, like his [ed.: Larry's] daddy. I was in the fourth grade, he was in the fifth grade at the time. We were out on the playground playing. The fourth grade was over here and the fifth grade was over here, and the other grades were in different places. Remember, Denmark was real small; it didn't have an abundance of students. But all of a sudden, this older kid started banging on me. My brother Herb—his [ed.: Larry's] daddy—saw what was happening and he came over and said, "Leave my brother alone." He said, "This is none of your business," the guy tells him. He said, "Yes, it is. He's my brother." He went like that towards my brother Herb and hit him in the nose, and Herb's nose started bleeding all over.

Some of the students got one of the teachers and they took them both to the office and said, "Who started this? And what was it about?" Neither one of them would answer. So he said, "Well, I'm going to find out." He said, "All right, Herb, you go in my office." And to whatever the guy's name—I wouldn't know it if you said it today—"You sit down there." So he closed the door, the principal did. He said, "Well, what started it? He wouldn't answer. He said, "I'm afraid to do this, but I don't want you to get in trouble, because I know your daddy will beat you with a belt." [Laughter.] He'd already warned us, our father did, when we first went to school: "If you get in trouble, I'm going to give you a whipping here at the house, and I'm going to take you to school and whip you in front of your class." So anyway—

SD: And he meant it, too.

TD: The principal said to Herb, "Come on, tell me who he was. He said, "No." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you. I got this paddle here. I'm going to hit the edge of the desk, and every time I hit it, I want you to holler 'Oy!'" He didn't whip him, he just told him to go to his class. The other guy he whipped.

LD: They were picking on you because you were Jewish?

TD: Yeah.

LD: In the fourth grade?

TD: In the fourth grade. The only other time besides that was when I was in the second grade, some of the kids started calling me fat Jew. I was very big. I was fat. Not like that. [Laughter.] But anyway.

LD: So you're saying after the fifth grade you didn't suffer any—

TD: Sixth. That was probably the sixth grade, I think, is when the last episode. One of the football kids started messing with me and he was calling me a fat Jew, too. I said, "Stop." He wouldn't stop, so I jumped on him. That's the first time I ever jumped on anybody and fought with anybody, and held him down on the ground on the playground. He said, "Let me up." I said, "No, I'm not going to let you up." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Because you called me a name that you shouldn't have said. Until you apologize for it and promise you'll never do it again, I'm not going to let you up." So some of the kids got around and said, "What's going on?" And finally the kid said, "I'm sorry, I won't say that again." And he didn't. That was the end of all of them.

LD: So Denmark was a pretty accepting town.

TD: Yeah, because my father was a tough guy. [Laughter.] And they had a good policeman. They had a good police chief.

LD: Well, there's a card there that he's an official deputy. Right in front of that book.

TD: Yeah, I saw that.

EF: They didn't want to cross him.

TD: I'm sorry?

EF: They didn't want to cross him.

SD: No.

TD: They didn't want to cross him, that's for sure. When I say he was tough, you could tell he was ready to fight. I don't know if he would or not, because I never heard of it.

LD: He had a strong Russian accent, too.

TD: *Ac*cent, *ac*cent.

SD: I'll never forget—

TD: Wait a minute, Sarah. When I went off to college to go to USC . . . when I came back home from the first semester, it was around Thanksgiving time, and I knock on the door and I hear voices. And so I listen and I hear this funny sounding voice. So I ring the doorbell. There was a doorbell there. [Laughs.] I said, "Who is that in there?" So my father came to the door. "Oh! Come on in." [Laughter.] He didn't give us keys to the house. We never had a key to the house. Anyway—

SD: His father didn't trust anybody. [Laughing.]

TD: —I said, "Who's that in the other room?" He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Who's that voice in the other room?" He said, "It was me talking." It was him.

SD: That's when he first realized he had—

TD: I never realized that my father had an *ac*cent. [Laughter.] Because that was the main place I went in my life for the first twelve years—no, fifteen, eighteen years, whatever. Fifteen years—twelve years. But anyway, the first major event in my life was leaving home, being the last one to leave home and go to college. I had no more idea in this world what I was going to do, or even—I knew a few students from Denmark. Other than that, I knew nobody.

LD: There were no relatives here in Columbia?

TD: Yeah, Bogen.

LD: Okay. Did you go to their house?

TD: *No.* My daddy wouldn't allow it.

LD: No, once you went to USC.

TD: Once I was at USC?

LD: Did you go over there and visit?

TD: No. I had no means of transportation except my feet. But look, it shows you you can be successful and be nobody.

TD: You can go from nobody to somebody.

SD: Yeah, you did that.

EF: Well, I think that's all my questions.

TD: You sure now?

EF: Yeah. I just want to ask you if you have anything else you want to talk about? If anything pops into your mind?

TD: Many times since I've been here, I've been like a representative to non-Jewish groups because they know I knew a lot of people from being in retail. They would call me and ask me—these are non-Jews—they would want to know could I get them this kind of prayerbook? [Unintelligible.] I was very accommodating. They didn't care how old the book was, they just wanted to see what a Jewish prayerbook was.

While I was president I made sure—I encouraged visitors to come there, rabbis to come, non-rabbis. The only thing I asked them to do was show respect for the house of God. Some of them said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "If you come into the synagogue, when you see the congregation, stand and be quiet. You stand and be quiet."

SD: And don't forget to wear the yarmulke.

TD: Oh, yeah, the head covering.

END RECORDING