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Brandon, Alfred

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Transcriber: Reyna Stovall

Sophia Maier (SM): All right. If you just want to start by telling me a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx?

Alfred Brandon (AB): Well, so the family as I gave you — I wrote some information, of course for you — my father's side, came from a town called Brody, which is about 100 kilometers northeast of Lviv and his mother came from Krakow. And on my mother's side, her father was born in Lviv, and her mother came from Budapest. So it was a little bit of a mix. They came — as far as I can see, I'm not quite sure — well, I know exactly when my father's father and mother came to the US because I do have their documents. So they arrived in 1890. The arrival point at that time was not Ellis Island, it was Castle Garden. And Ellis Island didn't start functioning I think until 1892. They married in Krakow, I have their actual wedding certificate.

SM: Oh, wow.

AB: And then they came. Now I believe that they settled in the Lower East, lower Lower East Side. One point I found the house address, but then I misplaced it, but I know that subsequently they moved to Forsyth Street. And Forsyth Street, there was a synagogue on the corner. Today it's some sort of Latin Evangelical [church], I think. My father was born on Forsyth Street in the apartment. And the other side, it's a little more vague. I think they came in 1900, but I'm not sure. And they also settled, and they weren't married, they married here. And they lived in the Lower East Side, I have addresses and I've actually been able to find images of the various apartment buildings of the time. Subsequently, my father's parents moved to Columbus Avenue, 842 Columbus Avenue, from Forsyth Street. And my mother's family moved to Bathgate Avenue. And I've gone — I actually remember Bathgate Avenue, only because I was born in January of '41. Actually the same day as Mozart but a different year. But in any case, I think we lived on Bathgate Avenue for the first nine months. And then subsequently, we moved to White Plains Road. My mother said, there's no way I could have remembered that we were living on Bathgate Avenue. In fact, my very first memory is looking out of the window up on the first floor — second floor, really — above the Bathgate Avenue store and looking out into the sunshine. And my mother said, boy, I couldn't have been more than nine months old, because at that point, we moved to White Plains Road. So it was probably quite remarkable, though, because to this day, I hold the image. The sun was rising in the east and you had all the activity of the street. And then my mother said — well, she still didn't believe it and then I described the colors in the room and she said that was accurate, because she said that was the only time I was there. So there was an image at nine months which is pretty bizarre. In any case, my mother's family had a store on Bathgate Avenue. The family name was Schorr, S – C – H – O – R – R. And they had the store until 1942 when most of them moved to Los Angeles. Interestingly, Bathgate Avenue, of course was all, I guess, Yiddish

speaking at the time. And I actually found — I have — a photograph done by Arthur Rothstein. You know, Arthur Rothstein did the photo collection for the WPA in the 1930s. And he actually did a series of pictures on Bathgate Avenue.

SM: Okay. I think that I've seen them.

AB: Right. Well, I actually — did you see the video that I made?

SM: No.

AB: It's on YouTube.

SM: Okay, I'll look it up.

AB: Yeah, I'll have to give you the location because what I did is I put together a video, with help from a friend, of my father's motion pictures. My father had somehow got access to color sixteen millimeter film in 1940.

SM: Wow.

AB: So I had a reel that he did in 1940 to '44 in color. And then subsequently, I had his eight millimeter footage. The first third or quarter of it is interesting. I put in actually some of Rothstein's pictures, and then some music support behind it. So you should really take a look at the opening for it. The latter part runs about an hour and a quarter. But the latter part deals more with the family in Los Angeles, later, so it's a little more nondescript, but the opening of it does give you actually an image of Bathgate Avenue at the time.

SM: So cool.

AB: So I have a friend who does film here and together we use some of the Ken Burns techniques. And we melded in — the big guy melded in the pictures that I had, plus the footage of the film that my father had, with the images from Rothstein. So you'll see that. So in any case, the store was functioning until '42. They left. My father's family moved to the Bronx in 1894. So they — it's unclear, but they bought, I don't know, they bought or built the building. It was the last — it was 4858 or 4850 White Plains Road, and the building is still there — and at the time, it was actually the last building in the Bronx. It's the most northerly building in the Bronx. And next to it was just — I recently, well not recently, I found a photograph of the building from probably 1894. With my grandfather standing outside, and I think my grandmother at the upper window. And next to it was a vacant lot. And so there must have been construction. I assume they did it, but there was an adjacent building constructed where I subsequently lived until I was nine years old. So basically,

we had this extended family living between my grandfather's store and house and apartments, and then what became our apartments as well. I don't want to take too far afield for you.

SM: No, no.

AB: So in any case, my grandfather was trained as an upholsterer. And he was trained — he came from Brody. He went to the town of Ternopil. Which is still in what today is Western Ukraine, at the time, it was Poland. Hold on, my earphones just popped out. And from Ternopil, after an apprenticeship, he went for a subsequent apprenticeship in Krakow and that's where he met my grandmother. And she was in the market. And according to my father, he said that my grandfather said, “Well, that's the one.” And they got married. And a few years ago, I went back to Krakow, and I actually found the store.

SM: Really? That's fantastic.

AB: Because I found the recommendation letter from the man with whom he did his apprenticeship. So his skills were upholstery and that's what he put on the arrival form when he reached Castle Garden. So he built a store, which, on the one side, in the photographs you'll see, was upholstery. The other side, the plan was to put in an ice cream parlor. But according to a cousin of mine, it never really evolved though they did buy the chairs. And as a child, I remember the chairs at the time of ice cream parlors — at apparently 1900 — had sort of a harp like wire backing. They had a round seat and it was a round wooden seat. And, anyway, a wire backing but I guess they never got to the ice cream. So my father's family lived there and subsequently with the birth of my father's sisters and himself my father and mother took that apartment in the adjacent building. Interestingly, my grandfather planted grapes in the backyard. And on one side, one yard had purple grapes, and the other one had green grapes. And he made his Shabbos wine from those grapes. And as a child, I would follow him into the basement where he had all his wine barrels. And I actually still have the wine press. I have it in my living room. I somehow rescued it from the house in Yonkers years ago, and I've been carrying it ever since. So I have this —

SM: Wherever you go —

AB: — with the wheel. Wherever I go I have the wine press. So I have the original wine press. And several years ago, I went back to White Plains Road. And the store was eventually — the building was bought out by I guess — a Jamaican guy ran a bar, a Jamaican bar. But he was a friendly guy and I went and talked to him and he took me to the backyard and my grandfather's grapes are still growing there. So that's pretty good.

SM: Does he make Jamaican wine?

AB: Well, that I don't know. He definitely can eat the grapes, the grapes are there. They're concord grapes and so on. So I have a lot of very distinct memories of living on White Plains Road since I lived there until I was nine. And I went to public school in the North Bronx at PS 16. It's still there. And my brother — What? Sorry.

SM: I was just going to ask what the neighborhood was like when you were living there?

AB: Well, it was a very odd sort of funny neighborhood, the main street on White Plains Road where we were on the front was basically Jewish. And on the next side, the left corner, it was Italian. And then on the other street, called South Street, was Black. So there were limited territories where you can walk. You can walk on the Jewish street, but you have to be careful on the Italian street and then you never walk on the Black street. That was sort of the way it worked. And as a matter of fact, there was one Jewish kid, my brother knew, right near the corner on the Jewish Street, on the corner of the Italian street and we visited him occasionally. So once I went over there as a child, and someone started throwing rocks at me. So I ran back, and I was hit by a car. But at that time, cars had running boards on the side, and so I fell on the running board and I was carried back to the house, but I was fine. But I was — it was just a miraculous that I was running away from the rocks and I fell on the running board. Hold on, these things just keep falling out of my ears.

SM: Yeah, they're annoying. The same thing happens to me.

AB: Anyway, so at that time, the Bronx trolley cars made the last stop in the Bronx actually in front of the upholstery store. And I would very often, as a child, sit with my grandmother on the stoop in front of the upholstery store, and we would watch the trolley cars come in. And I was pretty excited because the driver of the trolley car knew me at that point. And when he got to the last stop, he had all the unused colored transfers. And he would get off the trolley car and come over and hand me a booklet, which was very exciting at about five, six years old. Green and yellow and pink transfers that they hadn't used for the day. So, it was funny. So that's the end. Where do you want to take this? I can go in every direction. So the Bronx — the North Bronx at the time — the street we had was Jewish, with the Black street. Actually, [it] was sort of revolutionary at the time, there was a Black boy from the south street that my mother brought over once to see my comic book collection. So that was sort of exceptional, I remember that. That was an exceptional case. The street itself had — next to it at the time was called the Reuben Cohen Ironworks. And it doesn't exist anymore. It's replaced by a storage building or something like that. But I have pictures of it and there was a fellow from Reuben Cohen, a worker who sat outside on a box. And I, at that time I was sucking my thumb, and he said that he apparently lost a finger or thumb or whatever in the ironworks. And he would hold up his hand with a missing digit, and said, "You gotta be careful about sucking your thumb."

SM: So did that work? Did that deter you?

AB: No, I sucked my thumb until I was like nine years old. So anyway, the other part that was interesting, across the street was a small candy store. There was two things, there was a bakery on the — I'm ahead of myself. On the adjacent corner, there was a bakery, that's all dry bread. And when I got older, my mother would give me a dime and she would tell me to go buy a rye bread with seeds. It's very important, you have to have the caraway seeds. So I would, when I was getting some responsibility, I would go to the corner and get the rye bread with seeds. And then adjacent to it there was another candy store, also Jewish and then my dentist, Dr. Wexler, he was on the next corner. So it was like a little shtetl. Across across the street was a small corner building that sold comic books, my father would take me there to buy me books for my comic book collection and what was striking to me — again, I was probably no more than five or six years old — the owner was Mr. Black, a white man. And he was totally gaunt in appearance. Very, very thin. He wore a small vest. And we'd buy a comic book, but I was always struck by the fact that there was almost no expression, the face was just blank. And I never knew more about it until a few years ago, I was looking at the listings of men from New York State who had served in World War Two and what had happened to them. Some of them survived, were killed, so on. And then going down, it actually breaks down by the parts of the New York City. And so I actually found Mr. Black's son, and it said killed in action in New York State. And so he must have been killed in 1942, or something like that. And I was taken over there and the man clearly was broken at the loss of his son. And then suddenly the pieces came together and I began to understand this man's absence of expression, and so on. Very, very strange.

The North Bronx, the other part was, we had the — my brother went to Olinville Junior High School, which is still there. And I went, in elementary school, to PS 16. I was in PS 16 until the fourth grade, until the last nineteen days of the fourth grade actually. And my brother, at that point when I was nine — it's very important actually, the last nineteen days of fourth grade. I had a wonderful teacher there, Mrs. Canfield. She was just wonderful. And we had a wonderful relationship. And we moved to Yonkers in that period, but my brother was three and a half years older than me, so he went to Bronx Science. So he was at Bronx Science, and I ended up in Yonkers and then Mount Vernon. Interestingly, the Wakefield Public Library in the North Bronx at the time, which I guess is still there, had a stamp club. And I would go there on Saturday afternoon. My brother was following an Orthodox rabbi, so my brother wouldn't do it, but he would give — I was the Shabbos goy — so he gave me a small book, which I actually still have with the stamps and the prices, and he made a deal with me that on three cents or five cents, I would get a penny. And so my mother would walk me to the Wakefield Public Library on Saturday afternoon where I would try to sell these used postage stamps. It was crazy. So, in any case, my brother graduated from Olinville and then went to Science and I left PS 16 and went to PS 14 in Yonkers. There's a story. So, my father had built a house in Yonkers, he had promised my mother when they got married. And for some reason, there must have been some urgency, but he decided to take me out

of the public school with nineteen days left. And I was put into PS 14 at the time — nineteen days — and the teacher Mrs. Roberts was like a little church mouse, and at that time, children had to say The Lord's Prayer in the morning in school. And so each day she would take in rotation another child to stand before the class and lead the Lord's Prayer. Well, we were a quasi-Orthodox home, it was sort of some place between Conservative and Orthodox. I went through an Orthodox Hebrew School for eight years, the Congregation Brothers of Israel on Eighth Street in Mount Vernon. It's Evangelical now, but the synagogue is still there. And I didn't know the Lord's Prayer. Not only that, I thought by saying it, I'd probably be hit by lightning. So as the days went on, into the fourth grade, I became more nervous because I felt very threatened. And it's strange, because up to that point, I had this wonderful relationship with Mrs. Canfield in the Bronx. And then suddenly I was with Mrs. Roberts, who was awful. So in any case, at the end of the fourth grade, in that school, the children were split into the slow and fast classes for the next four years. And we'd been divided. And so Mrs. Roberts decided I wasn't very smart and I was put in the slow class. And the slow class — the two classes is rather interesting. The fast class were all Protestant and they had supplemental activities and field trips and all kinds of stuff. And the slow class were all Italians, and one Black girl, and myself and Gina Lowenberg, the only Jewish girl. So there were only two Jewish students in the school, and one Black and Italians, the rest were all Protestants. And I ended up being in the slow class for the next four years.

SM: Wow.

AB: It's crazy, but I got my revenge, because in graduation in the eighth grade, they announced I got the — it was a Bronze Medal from the American Legion Society for outstanding citizenship and scholarship. So I had the best grades in the school.

SM: Yeah, you were like, "I beat you."

AB: Even though I was in the dummy class before, four years in the dummy class. But the only light was I had a sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Weiss. She was a Jewish teacher. And she had show and tell. And most of the kids in my dummy class were very inhibited but I had no problem. So she would always call on me to get up and no one else would say anything. She called me up and I would sit up there and I would tell stories. And so, I was always in love with Mrs. Weiss, you know, it was wonderful. So a wonderful relationship. So she was the star for me in that period.

SM: And when you were at — Sorry, I just had a question that I was thinking about earlier. So when you were at PS 16, was it a mix of students from the Italian street, the Jewish street and the Black street together at PS16?

AB: Yeah, I don't remember a whole lot of Black kids. I remember it was dominantly Italian and Irish and a few Jewish students. And the only other Jewish student that I was friends with was

Howie Ruben. He was in the elementary school with me. But interestingly, I do remember we had an auditorium presentation for United Nations Day at the time. And I was picked to lead the United Nations. So all the children were lined up in the auditorium by the side of me with all different costumes, and I had a Mexican sombrero hat. And so I stood in the auditorium at the center with all the other nations to my side. So that was rather special. And I know my parents showed up for the presentation so they were impressed. I was in the center, it was cute.

Other aspects of living in the North Bronx, my mother would take me — there was a kosher chicken market, we had to take the trolley. And somewhere in probably in the Wakefield area, there was like this large barn-like structure and it had the chickens and that's where we would get this kosher chicken. Previously, interestingly, there was a chicken market next to the Shaws Textile Fabric Shop on Bathgate Avenue. And I found a picture from Rothstein. It's actually when you look at the video on YouTube, you'll see the chicken market. So it says chicken market in Hebrew letters. It's actually ticket market, but it's chicken market. So in any case, I was very comfortable on White Plains Road, you know, that was my turf. Once I sold postcards from our trips, I put them in the little fence and tried to sell them. I didn't sell any. And then downstairs — two of the stores — one was rented to a tailor and the other was rented to an Italian barber. Mr. Delvecchio was the tailor, he was very quiet. And next was Mr. Montalvo, he was the barber and that's where I got my haircuts. And he had a big, semi-spherical silver aluminum pot where he kept the hot towels. And next to it, he had a nice picture of the Bridge of Sighs, I guess in Venice. And anyways, that's where I got my haircuts. So we had haircuts. The street was home turf, it was comfortable with a yard. We had the backyard with the grapes. We had the —

SM: And when you were there, were you in an apartment building? Or were you in like a single family home?

AB: No, no, no, you'll see it when you look at the video. There was — so you had the upholstery store and then above it was my grandparents' apartment and then the adjacent building was where we lived above another store —

SM: Okay, that's what I thought.

AB: — and we had our own small apartment. And my mother started my brother in violin lessons when he was about six or something. So we had a violent teacher come who had a wig. And his wig was always getting a little loose. And my grandmother wanted me to play the piano and I didn't have piano lessons but what she had at the time was paper keys. Fold out paper keys. And you'd pretend you were playing the piano. But they did have a piano upstairs, a Spinet. And my grandfather was quite deaf and so when he was lying in the bed, they would bring me up there to play the piano for him. And I would just bang on it for a long time or whatever. And he was fine with it. And the upstairs had a large dining room where we had Passover Seders, and we would

walk to the synagogue. We were very much linked to the Congregation Brothers of Israel, so that — I think my grandfather may have given it a contribution and was somehow involved in construction of that. I think it was built around 1908 or something. I'm not sure. So it was known as CBI. And the way it worked at the time was that I had public school until 2:30 in the afternoon, and then at 2:30, I would go to be picked up and then I would go to the Congregation Brothers of Israel, then I was in Hebrew school until 6:00 in the evening. So it was a pretty long day. And I don't remember how many days a week we did that, but I ended up going there for almost eight years in Hebrew school. So I had both. But other than getting some rocks thrown at me, I was pretty comfortable in the North Bronx. I mean, I wasn't frightened. It was familiar. And it was a large family compound so it was quite unusual.

SM: And did you travel to other parts of the Bronx, other parts of the city or even?

AB: Well, yes, of course. Again, '42 was the end of the Bathgate Avenue store when my mother's family moved, but up until that point we went every year to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade which was on — what's the street, next to Central Park? Central Park West. The one in front of the Museum of Natural History?

SM: Yeah. Oh my goodness. Columbus?

AB: Columbus, no, the one before 77 and 6th Avenue? Maybe 6th, anyway we would go. That was every Thanksgiving, we went to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, that was pretty exciting. And we went to — my father liked this kosher restaurant down on Delancey Street, it was called Gluckstern's. And they had a special, it was vegetarian chopped liver.

SM: Have you ever had any vegetarian chopped liver?

AB: Well, my wife actually makes it. It's made out of walnuts. It's walnuts and mushrooms and actually, I liked it. And I'm saying, "Well, it tastes like chopped liver." It was pretty good. Anyway, walnuts and it's called vegetarian chopped liver. But otherwise, we would get the chicken from them. I would go with my mother to the market and, once again, back to the chicken market in the North Bronx and we would bring home the chicken and then with the discovery was whether they were eggs, meaning yolks and, of course, there was the one chicken liver. So my mother would cook the chicken liver, she would cook it on the grate on top of the stove. And then the bonanza would be if we got several eggs and those are delicious. We'd roast the egg yolks and the liver on the grate, it was wonderful.

SM: Yeah, that's funny you say that just because both my dad's parents are both from the Bronx and we were just talking — they're up for the graduation — we were just talking about getting a chicken and the luck of if it had any eggs.

AB: Yeah. Oh, that was very exciting. So they'd see three or four eggs and they'd say, "bonanza." It was pretty neat. My mother worked — she went to Morris High School. And I have — it's funny, I have a yearbook for four of the five years, though I think her graduation year was 1926. And I think I gave that book to my cousin in California. But I have to go find out because I couldn't find any references to her in the book, even though I have her actual diploma. Interestingly, she then went to what was called the School of Applied Fine Arts [New York School of Fine And Applied Art], which became Parsons School of Design. So I actually have all her scrapbooks and notebooks from the School of Applied Arts [New York School of Fine And Applied Art]. And I have — some of her exercises were drawings, done in the period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum. So, you know, if you're in the Metropolitan, there are rooms from French provincial and different periods and so on. And I have about eight or so of her original drawings from the museum exercise. And I've gone to the museum and tried to match up a couple of them and so on. In any case, the school subsequently was renamed as Parsons School of Design. And I guess in 1926, my mother decided she wanted to go to Paris, because where else would you go for art in the 1920's?

SM: Of course.

AB: And so, according to some apocryphal story, she actually got a ticket to Paris and went down to the docks and was getting on the boat and my grandmother, Bertha, said, "I can't it's too dangerous," and yanked her off so she didn't go. So that interrupted her, so she instead ended up working in the fabric store on Bathgate Avenue. I have a very large collection of her drawings and works. They're quite nice and they're actually all being uploaded onto SmugMug because I had someone recently photograph them all. They're really, really exquisite work.

SM: Did your father have any college education?

AB: No, my father, he was the only son. There were four sisters and my father. My father was born November 1st, 1897. And he was a sportsman. Apparently he graduated from high school and got a full scholarship — or a sports scholarship — to Columbia based on baseball. But he decided he didn't want to take it, for some reason he elected not to go to college. And the war started for the US, I guess in 1917. And as the son and the only son of a new immigrant, they were very patriotic, so the story is a little convoluted, but he apparently went down and volunteered to enlist in the Navy. And there are two stories. The Navy, in my understanding, in World War One, the Navy did not accept Jews into the US Navy if they could identify them or knew them. So I mean, Jews clearly got in but they were the crypto Jews or whatever. But in any case, the name Brandon, a lot of people thought was Protestant. But it's actually Irish. When I went to Ireland, people thought I was Brennan. So my name, Alfred Brandon, most people assume is a Protestant name. And worse than that, in Florida, a lot of Blacks use Brandon as a first name. So very often people call me — my name is Alfred Brandon — people call me Dr. Alfred. So they think Brandon

is my first name. Anyway, so my father decided to join the Navy. And there are two stories. One story is he went down and they didn't take him because he was Jewish. But I don't know if it's true. And then another story was he went back, and then they accepted him because they thought he was Irish. But then my brother wrote a long piece about my father, which I have, in which he claimed it was actually because of my father's age at the time. So I'm not quite sure where the truth is in all of that. In any case, my father was accepted and he was sent to Charleston, South Carolina. And actually, two months ago, I went to the Navy Yard, what's remnants of the Navy Yard — there's a memorial there — from Charleston, South Carolina. There are one or two excellent buildings. But I have photographs from the Navy of 1917 and those will also be — everything's in SmugMug to be aptly captured. And so he was in the Navy. Interestingly, apparently he had background in upholstery from his father. But I see on his pictures, his cap says naval aviation. After he died in 1986, I was rummaging through the store in the Bronx and I found his navy diary, his diary from the Navy. And in it, it has all his notes about how to start a propeller, how to twist it. It has the inventory of the planes — this is all on SmugMug, at least I think so — and has inventory of the planes. But I never knew what he did. He never flew. And according to a cousin, I think what he did at the time — the wings were covered with canvas — so I think he was the canvas fitter. I think so. But there are wiring diagrams also in the diary. It is quite remarkable. The other part that was fascinating was I was going through the diary and I found an entry for, I think it was October 18th, 1918. And in it it says, “I have a temperature of 105 and they put me in the infirmary.” And next to it he wrote, “Spanish flu.” And then he wrote he was treated with brown salts — I wasn't quite sure what that was — and quinine. Quinine was used for temperature. And, you know, there were tremendous losses of men from Spanish flu.

SM: Yes.

AB: But he said he was in the infirmary for four or five days, and then he was released.

SM: Wow.

AB: It's really amazing. So I have several of his artifacts from his Navy period. A couple have been lost. But I had, at one time I had his bugle and so on, and I have some of his clothing and at one time I had a gas mask. I don't know where it is. And, you know, different things. So my father didn't go on any further — he did go to Columbia for Boy Scout training. And I think he became — I have his diploma — so I think he became the first Boy Scout leader in Mount Vernon, New York. So that was pretty good. And I have pictures of him in his camping period. Well, so that was his education. But he was a very smart man. And he, as a child, we always read the New York Times. So my father did, he read The Daily Argus, which was the Mount Vernon paper. We always got two newspapers, The Daily Argus and the New York Times. And he read the New York Times until he was 89 plus, and he read it every day. And my mother clipped it. She clipped the articles. That was before emails, right? My mother — I eventually went off to the University of Chicago

and my mother and father would just send so many clippings. They were like a clipping service. So I would just get these thick letters filled with articles they thought I should know about from the New York Times.

SM: At least they kept you up to date with what was going on.

AB Everything. It was really funny. Funny story.

SM: And so what did your father end up doing once he got back?

AB: Well, so, he initially went into — I know in the 1930s he set up a hardware store. Even so it was sort of natural. First he worked with my grandfather and they made horsehair mattresses. Mattresses at the time were horsehair and I slept on a horsehair mattress all through high school. It was wonderful. It has compression and a bounce to it and it was wonderful. I slept on it all through high school. And I have a picture of the truck and it says, “Horsehair mattresses.” That was their specialty. So it was stuffed horsehair and the glue for the joints of the furniture was made out of horses hoofs. So they would melt the hoofs at the horse factory. They called it the glue factory. As a five and six year old, I would wander around the upholstery store when my grandfather was working on the furniture. He always had a little cigar, little stogie, and the smell — the melted horses hoofs were in a small pot on a little flame because they had to keep it in liquid form and it gave off a very pungent smell. And so to this day, I can identify the smell. And I found the actual pot and I have it in my closet in my display museum in Miami. So I actually have the original pot with the glue in it. And that was used for the furniture. And I have one piece of furniture, I have a stool that he made, which is still rock solid, made with the horse glue. So my father, in any case, with I guess the background was from the Navy — the Navy, certainly in World War One, was very hands on. And he worked with tools and he tied rope. My father was very good. In the Navy you had to learn knots. And whenever he did packaging, he would show me how to make knots and I can still make knots based on what he showed me. The sheepshank and the half sheepshank and square knots and so on and so on.

So I guess between the background of the upholstery and the Navy, the natural step was him to go into something like hardware. So he opened a hardware store on Gramatan Avenue in Mount Vernon and then expanded it into a larger store, Brandon Hardware, on Mount Vernon Avenue and Bond Street. And he sold that store, the store itself, in 1952 to ‘54, somewhere around there. And then from that he took the money and started to buy old buildings and fix them up. So he eventually acquired about a dozen buildings and almost all of them were in Mount Vernon. And for the rest of his life, he was always repairing them. They were always falling down, he’d pick them up and so on. My father was a very warm, outgoing man, and he basically lived on Mount Vernon Avenue. And everybody on the street knew him and, first of all, he had the hardware store. And then after the hardware store, he had all the buildings. So he was just a fixture on Mount

Vernon Avenue. And he would take me when he had the hardware store, he would buy some of his supplies on Ludlow Street in the Lower East Side. On Sunday morning, we would go in the car to his buddy's on Ludlow Street, and he would buy brooms and take them back to the store on Mount Vernon. So that was part of it. Because he was the Boy Scout leader, his boy scouts — I guess, post-war in the 1920s — when World War Two came, these guys ended up in the military. So we ended up — his friends in Mount Vernon then were the result of this, his Boy Scouts that went into the war. And just as a separate point, you can again see it, I assume on SmugMug with pictures.

There was a welcome ceremony at the YMHA in Mount Vernon in 1919 for Jewish members of the military, and the speaker was Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. So it was a sign but it turns out it wasn't Theodore Roosevelt. It was Theodore Roosevelt's brother or his cousin who was killed on Omaha Beach. And he signed the evening brochure. So I have that, and what they ate and the menu. And so it listed all the Jews from Mount Vernon. Three had been killed, and the rest were in the various branches of the military. So my father had the Boy Scouts and the Boy Scouts grew into World War Two. So when he had the buildings in Mount Vernon, I would go with him in his car to get gas. We went to get gas down at the Mount Vernon station on the bottom of Mount Vernon Avenue. And out came Mr. Soloff. And Mr. Soloff wore his flight jacket. And Mr. Soloff was a bomber pilot who dropped bombs over Germany. He killed a lot of Nazis he flew over. So he came out, he wore a big mustache and his leather jacket, and they'd all, you know, slap on the back, and they're all very happy to see each other. So I think he was one of my father's Boy Scouts. So he'd always tell me how many missions he flew over Germany and bombed Germans. Pretty amazing. My father, in any case, was a very bright man. But his primary source of information was the New York Times. We got the New York Times every day and my mother would clip it.

SM: Were they politically involved at all?

AB: They were Democrats. They always voted for Roosevelt. And, in fact, I even remember in '44 hearing Roosevelt's last fireside chat in the Bronx. We were still living in White Plains Road. And in the living room, we had a tall brown, big radio. We had two radios. We had a small Zenith by the kitchen table, and we had the big one in the living room. And it was probably '44. I was three years old. And I remember hearing Roosevelt speaking, and so on. That was their orientation. They definitely were only Democrats and always voted for Roosevelt. And then later on, when Adlai Stevenson ran for president — I joined as a high school student — I campaigned for Adlai Stevenson. So that was their political linkage.

But beyond that, they were very adventurous in terms of travel. From 1948 to about 1955 we made six trips by car from New York to Los Angeles, because we went to spend — I spent every summer from three to fifteen, twelve summers — I spent in Fairfax. Fairfax is — I don't know if you know Los Angeles at all. You know, the farmers market? Maybe you've been to the Farmers Market in

Los Angeles. It's called The Grove now. And CBS Studios, it was always CBS Studios and Hollywood. Well, it wasn't in Hollywood, it was in Fairfax. Fairfax was all Jewish refugees. The whole street. The only languages you heard were Yiddish and Hungarian. It's like when I was there, it was like little Tel Aviv. That's what it was like. And so I spent all my summers there. From June to September, I lived on Ogden Drive next to Fairfax Avenue. And so that was the – so I had two families. I had my father's family in New York and my mother's family in Los Angeles. And then she had all the cousins and so on there.

SM: Yeah. And was it very different for you when you were in California as opposed to [New York]?

AB: Yeah, I never understood why we went back to New York, because it was just warm and dry and the nights were cool. And I'd ride there in June, I had all my cousin's there. I had my grandmother and grandfather and my grandmother made apple pie from Budapest. And it was wonderful. But somehow before Labor Day, we had to go back. So we made six trips by car through different routes, route 66 and all around the North, South. And I collected postcards and decals, which I still have this big album from all the trips, overall six trips. And then the other trips we made by train. So the Santa Fe and 20th Century Limited and so on. And the first trip I made was 1944. I made it from New York to Chicago, I guess it was 20th Century Limited and we got on the train and the train was filled with soldiers going to the Pacific so they got priority seats. So there were no seats. So my mother opened the suitcase in the aisle, with all the clothes and I slept in the clothes on the suitcase. And then from there, we went to Chicago and in Chicago, you have to change stations on South Street Station or something. And it was very exciting. And you can imagine I was five, six, seven years old, and you'd get there and you'd see these huge trains with the steam coming out and you have chug chug chug and so on. It was very exciting. And so the next two days we rode in the sleeper car from Chicago to LA. I did that six times, so six times by train and six times by car. Amazing, amazing trips.

My father insisted I see virtually every museum. And so I went through every town we went through across the United States. During those trips, my father would find the museum. And my father also worked for synagogues so then if he found a synagogue and we were really lucky we'd get a kosher salami. My mother would sit in the back seat, and she would cut up the salami and hand us sandwiches in the front. And that's how we went across — that or we had hard boiled eggs. And the hard boiled eggs, she would cook over a sterno in the motel. So the night before she cooked the hard boiled eggs, and then she passed over the hard boiled eggs or the salami sandwiches. And that's how we went across. We had Triple A triptychs, no GPS, I had no idea where the next gas station was. We had one bucket of water. And we got lost all the time. We'd go 60 miles this way, 60 miles that way. But eventually, we made it. And it was pretty crazy. It's pretty amazing really. You actually can make that kind of trip in a Buick or on a rail. My father would drive 400 miles and it was pretty cool. But it was sort of, you know, just pretty wild. And

there was the original Route 66. So in any case, my mother continued to paint. But her skills were the skills she had as a teenager in the 20s. Of course, they were not the same anymore. But even to the end of her life she was still painting. I have a lot of her paintings that are much more crude, but the early ones were exquisite. And you'll see them online.

SM: Great, yeah. So tell me a little bit more about Jewish life. I know you said you were involved in —

AB: Well, the Jewish life was interesting. The Rabbi at Congregation Brothers of Israel in Mount Vernon was Klavan. And he was a member of the Orthodox Rabbis in the United States at the time. He was eventually replaced, he died and was replaced by a rabbi, Solomon Fralick. But my brother fell under Klavan and Klavan had decided that my brother would be Orthodox. And so my father said that Klavan was the one who put the press on him. And so my brother carried on for years through his life as if he was Orthodox. Though he eventually married a first wife — he married twice — and the first wife was a Moroccan French woman. He got a divorce and — my brother is a story in itself. And we didn't even know that they were married until they got a divorce. And then later on, he married a WASP from Georgia, whose son married Ted Turner's daughter. So that's pretty cool. Then she was the end stage alcoholic, my brother seemed to be attracted to end stage alcoholics: take them to the clinic and reform them, save them. My brother graduated Bronx Science when he was sixteen. He was in class with Carl Sagan. And my brother supposedly had an IQ test at Bronx Science of 149. So he went off to — he wanted to go to Harvard — but he got accepted to the University of Chicago and he went to Chicago when he was sixteen. And after he was there, four years, he basically dragged me to Chicago, which was a big mistake for me. I mean, that opens up a whole world of history. When I graduated high school, I got a New York State Scholarship, four years any school in New York State based on all my scores, and my father said, "Go to NYU." And I could have gone to Williams. And for some reason, my brother kept saying, "Go to Chicago," so I went to Chicago and it was a total disaster, because my brother kept trying to make me more Orthodox. And I was like a rebel.

So in any case, one of the Hebrew school issues was, in addition to the weekdays when we went in the afternoons to Hebrew school, we went on Sunday morning. And so I remember one Sunday morning, I would walk with my brother from White Plains Road to South Eighth Avenue to Hebrew school, and when we got halfway there, I just refused. I just didn't want to go. I did not want to go. And I started fighting. I didn't want to go and he was dragging me to the Hebrew school. And there was a bunch of Italian kids and I said, "Just hold on to him and let me get out of here." And so they held on to him, and I ran home. I didn't want to go to Hebrew school. And they beat him up, not badly, but they punched him I guess, a couple times. And so my brother came home and my father was — very rarely did my father ever punish me, very rarely, only maybe two or three — actually, that was probably the only time of significance. But he then forbade me that afternoon — normally, on Sunday afternoon, they'd take me to the movie theater down on White

Plains Road further down on the left. I don't know, I think it was Tom Nix or something. And I had to sit home on the couch. I was punished, timeout, you know, for letting my brother get beaten up by the Italian kids in Hebrew school. So in any case, we were both Bar Mitzvahed at Congregation Brothers of Israel, but I have absolutely zero recall of my brother being Bar Mitzvahed. I don't understand it. I don't know anything about it. I don't remember seeing it. I can't understand it whatsoever how I have no recall of it. I was Bar Mitzvahed in Congregation Brothers of Israel with Solomon Fralick at the time.

But it's strange, so my brother just carried on with his Orthodoxy. And then we went to Chicago and the problems continued to try to make me more Orthodox and more observant and I was rebellious and separating. And it was endless conflicts and just screwed up my academic career. It took me a decade to recycle. The whole thing was so screwy, the whole thing was totally unnecessary. To me, it completely distorted my — what it was going to be, I think, an illustrious academic career. And it took me literally a decade to straighten it out. Then Vietnam came in between, and that really made everything crazy. So my brother spent eleven years and nine summers at the University of Chicago. He was Managing Editor for the Chicago Maroon, which was like the Harvard Crimson, and so on. And he got three degrees there. He got a Bachelor's — what was called the Hutchins BA that was like a general studies degree in humanities and social sciences that would have been created by Mortimer Adler from the great books, combined with Robert Hutchins who had been the Dean at Yale Law School. And together they created what's called the Hutchins BA. So my brother got the Hutchins BA, then he got a bachelor's in math. Then he went into graduate math, and then he left graduate math and went into history of philosophy of science, and got a master's in history and philosophy of science. Then he left Chicago after eleven years. My parents paid for eleven years and nine summers of school. It was coo coo. Then he went to New York and worked for Xerox for a while, and then that's a separate story.

So anyway, in terms of Jewish life, we had a Pesach Seder on the second floor above the upholstery store and my father's sisters, there were four, they would come to the Seder. So it was a large event. And we had two very special glasses. We had glasses for Elijah and the family on the table, but according to the story, one of the glasses supposedly had come from Spain. So this was the story, it has decals on it of grapes. And the story was that it was passed on to the firstborn son in subsequent generations, but that in various generations it had been dropped and chipped. And then it was filed down so the glass would get progressively shorter. And so, in any case, my brother who became very deviant when he divorced his wife, and all kinds of mental issues, he wanted the glasses, but I basically stole them. And he sued me for 10 years in court.

SM: For the glasses?

AB: I never gave them back to him. And he died two years ago, I have the glasses, and I have them in the cabinet in Miami. But they were very special. Your fingers would shake when you — you couldn't even touch them, you know, because they were multigenerational. And then the question arose, in fact, were the Brandons really from Sephardic origin or Ashkenazi? For a period, I always thought that we were derivative Portuguese because Brandon was B — R — A — N — D — O, actually pronounced as Brandon in Portuguese. And actually, three weeks ago, I was in Portugal. My wife and I went to Portugal for the first time, and we passed the train station in Portugal. And it said, "This is the hometown of Marlon Brando." So anyway, I thought there was some roots. And then we went to the — the story was that the Jews came out of the Portuguese Inquisition, the Portuguese Inquisition was about 1538.

SM: Yes.

AB: And so then the Jews went to — they split, they went to Bayonne, France, and the others went to Amsterdam. And there were three routes and the third route went from Portugal around the Iberian Peninsula, the Adriatic, and ended up in Eastern Poland. And that's how you get Sephardic names like Silva in Eastern Poland. And so where were we? Oh, so the assumption was that they were Sephardic origin. So I carried on this idea, but then we went ahead and did 23 And Me and we did Ancestry, and I come back as 99% Ashkenazi, 1% Hungarian, so I'm not quite sure where the source is. But in any case, my wife and I went to the synagogue in Bayonne because we knew there was some story. And I got the cemetery books from the 1600s open to me in the synagogue and we went to this closed cemetery, but we couldn't identify them because it was the 1600s. But I have all the listings of all the Brandons in the Bayonne synagogue in the 1600s. Anyways, the story goes on and on.

So in Jewish life, we would go to Congregation Brothers of Israel, we would walk to the synagogue up from White Plains Road. It was a short walk. And CBI was a very central part of our life. Between the Hebrew school and the Bar Mitzvahs and my cousin's marriage there in the 1950s. It was a strong part of it. And then the street itself had, of course, as I told you before, we had the ironworks, Reuben Cohen, Jewish. We had the grocery store and the bakery and we had the candy store and we had the dentist and so on. Interestingly, my wife and I went back up there again a few years ago. And I tried to — I wanted to, though I haven't done it — approach the people who live in the apartment upstairs where we were as a child. I want to go back in there, but I haven't done it yet. But anyway, there was this construction next to the fence on the north side of the backyard, so my wife and I went to the small passageway to look through the fence. So I can look into the backyard where the grapes were. And in the dirt I saw some metal, so I pulled it out and it was a horseshoe. So in this construction for this storage building that was going up, I found a horseshoe in the mud. I have it. I have it in Miami. I took it. And so, obviously 1910 when this was functioning, it was all horseshoes or horses. It's pretty funny.

SM: In the questionnaire you put that you ended up going to Israel?

AB: Many times, but later on.

SM: Okay.

AB: I went all together to Israel nine times. So I spent three and a half years in Israel all together. And my life went through a lot of conflict after I left Chicago. I fell in love with a girl from New York and so I left Chicago, I was offered a position for a PhD in biochemistry at Chicago. But I was in love with this girl. And I was like, I'd been five years in Chicago. And I said, "Screw it. I'm going to New York." So I get to New York and I get a letter from the Yonkers Draft Board: "Appear in 10 days for your physical for Vietnam." So my father was in the Navy. And he said, "No way." And he's looking in the New York Times, which he was doing every day, and he sees "New York Medical College opened a master's degree in biochemistry," like three lines. He said, "Go down there," because at that time, if you were pursuing a graduate degree in the sciences, you got — let me just see what time it is.

SM: 2:15

AB: That's fine. I don't have to go until three o'clock. Anyway, if you were pursuing a graduate degree in the sciences, you would get an exemption, you'd get a student deferment. So he said, "Go down there and register and you'll get a deferment." So I went down there and I spent the next year and a half in a laboratory. And I got a master's degree in biochemistry. For me, it was a piece of cake, because Chicago was a much more sophisticated institution. But they were happy to have me because I already had graduate biochemistry in Chicago. And so I finished there after about a year and three quarters. Plus the years in the laboratory. And I get a letter from the draft board. New York Medical College notified the draft board that I graduated. I'm ready to be taken again. So I got another letter from the Yonkers Draft Board: "Appear in 10 days." I'm not going to Vietnam. So I start writing to a guy in England: "I'm far afield for your studies but" — It's a really crazy story. So in any case, I write to a guy in England, David Stafford Clark, he was chief of psychiatry at the Guy's Hospital, a famous hospital in London. And I said, "Listen, I can come there and do a PhD in biochemistry interfacing with various psychiatric illnesses and I can pursue my biochemistry" — in what we called bioactive amines at the time. So I fly to London, and I register and sent back to the draft board and lo and behold I'm 2S again, student deferment.

SM: Yeah, wow.

AB: And — hold on this is I don't know this is a spam I don't want to answer it.

SM: There we go. Can't hear you. How about now, can you hear me?

AB: Yeah, now I can hear you. Okay, so anyway, I go off to London. And it's a crazy situation because — I won't take too much time but — so the chairman invites me to his house. It was a welcome dinner and at the welcome dinner he has a registrar. It's called a resident, in England a registrar, who turns out to be a Syrian. And somehow I didn't realize it, but I had been in Israel and somebody mentioned that I had been on a kibbutz near the Golan. And suddenly, I was the targeted enemy. And so the rest of the evening was awful. And then Stephen Clark, who was sort of a crypto gay because he was rubbing my leg during the drive with the chauffeur over to his house — weird story — but he suddenly realized that Alfred Brandon wasn't Alfred Brandon, that Guy's hospital London didn't accept Jewish students for decades. Well anyway, so the fellowship — I was supposed to get a Nuffield Fellowship in England for this and the fellowship never emerged. And so after six months, I decided that — it's a long story what happened — but after six months, I just walked out on whole thing, I realized the whole thing was just bogus.

And so I went to Paris, and Paris at the time was in — 1968 — was in revolution. There was a Jewish guy named Daniel Kahneman, the German Jewish guy who was running the revolution and leading it and everybody was fighting in the streets and the police had batons and it was a pretty crazy place. So I was there for a bit but meantime, my father's holding my mail to post restante in general delivery. And there lo and behold, Yonkers Draft Board. Third time, "Report for physical." I'm in Paris with Cohn-Bendit, what am I going to do? There's no way I'm going to Vietnam. So I get on a train. I knew the Danish weren't supporting the war. So I got on the train. And my father was sending me about \$20 every two weeks. That's what I lived on. I got on a train and I went to Copenhagen and I walked into the University of Copenhagen. And I said, "I want to register for a PhD in" — they called the natural sciences. And I already had a master's in biochemistry. So a nice girl behind the counter with sort of red curly hair was sitting there behind an old Underwood typewriter. And she said, "Okay," so she registers me. And she said, "You know, it's not free." "Well, how much is it?" She says, "80 crowns," which is about \$8. I said, "I think I can handle it."

SM: You're like "Alright from my \$20."

AB: So I registered and I then sent my registration — oh, no, she said "Is there anything else you wanted?" And I said, "Yeah, I need a letter for my draft board." So she types up letters saying "We hereby registered full time student" because I was doing a PhD and, blah, blah, blah. And it says, "Dean of the University of Copenhagen." I said, "It says Dean?" She said, "No, don't worry about it, I sign all these letters." So she said, "Do you want me to send it? Or do you want to send it?" I said, "It's probably better if you send it." She sends the letter to the Yonkers Draft Board and a couple of weeks later I actually get a letter from Yonkers Draft Board, that "You're here by classed as two s, student deferment, as your work is viewed as vital to the defense of the Republic." I just thought, Okay. At that point, I didn't even want to do a PhD anymore. I was done with this whole thing, I wanted to do medicine actually, I didn't want to do a PhD, because I had been in a lab for

a year and a half. And, that was it. And so then I was there. I was hanging out in Copenhagen and it got cold. And so I went to Israel. And then when it got warm again in Denmark, I went back to Denmark, and I did that until the end of the Vietnam War. And so I went back and forth to Israel. And then I ended up going to medical school in Belgium, which is like a completely different saga. And then I did my last half of internship in Jerusalem, at the Old Shaare Zedek Hospital, and so on. So the story goes on and on. So anyway, that's sort of an overview.

SM: No, that was fantastic. Thank you. I always like to kind of end with a more kind of thought provoking question. And so, when you think back on your time growing up in the Bronx, and growing up in the area, what kind of emotions and memories do you associate with it?

AB: My memories of the Bronx were extraordinarily positive. Even actually, you know, it's strange. As we get older, our early memories get more distinct, because these are long term memories that are deeply embedded, as opposed to repetitive acts that we do every day today. And my memories are extraordinarily positive. I had wonderful parents. I had wonderful grandparents. And I felt I was always surrounded by just this — they cared so much for me and my achievements. And even to this day, I still feel when I do something positive — because I've worked in radiation oncology for 30 years — I still feel like I'm demonstrating to my parents that I'm doing something that is righteous and correct. It's very strong. My father was an extraordinary, very honest man. I know that many times — I remember returning a wallet to him, he once gave a whole house away to a poor family in Mount Vernon, old houses in newspapers. I mean, it's just a totally magnanimous personality. And my mother was very careful. Then she had the art skills and then she spent time with me and my drawings for my school projects. You know, she would work with me on the drawings because it was her forte. When my father built the house in Yonkers, he called it the House on the Knoll, and he promised it to my mother when they got married that he would build them a house. And my mother said to him, “I want you to build a trellis in the backyard, and I will plant on it Wisteria.” And he did. And my mother painted it. I have the picture. So I have a painting she made of the promise that he gave to her. And I have the painting of the light lavender Wisteria on the trellis in the backyard. And that was their bond.

It was wonderful. So I couldn't have asked for more wonderful parents. And I had two interests in high school, I had medicine and astronomy. Those were my two interests. And I founded the astronomy club at Davis High School, and so on and so forth. And my fellow students were wonderful, the younger ones. They went to MIT and Amherst and Harvard, and so on. They're just tremendous, tremendous. And I gave lectures on astronomy in high school. And my father built an attachment on the house with steps leading up to the roof so that I could go to the top of the roof and watch the stars. And then I did — not to get too far afield — my father took a Bellows camera, which I still have, to the Navy in 1917. He took pictures in Charleston, South Carolina. And that was the first camera on which I took pictures. He showed me how to use it. So I developed an interest in photography. And then I founded the photography club in high school. And so I had

photography club and the astronomy club. And my father then built an entire darkroom for me in the basement of the house in Yonkers, so worked there. And I built my own instruments for designing and improving photographs. So it was this whole thing. Everything was supported all the way through. It was just wonderful. But I mean, then I have my brother and that was like, totally coo coo. There's a very sad part of that story with my brother. And that was a genius that went astray. Incredible, long story. A lot of pieces in the puzzle. Anyway, I think I can send it to you. But it's L'chaim Shore brand and I'll send it to you. Again, the last half of it deals more with family in Los Angeles, but the first third deals with the period in the Bronx and the store and the buildings and everything I've talked to you about.

SM: Yeah. All right. I'm definitely looking forward to looking at it.

AB: And in terms of access, again, I don't know what format it is right now with the — I have like 50,000 to 60,000 photographs in my files. And I have, again, a lot of documentation. I think a lot of those photos, I don't think they're in the SmugMug. So that's a different access. But in any case, you know, you can look through some of them, you'll see in the background. Anyway, anytime if you wanted to expound on any of it, you're more than welcome to give me a call.

SM: Thank you.

AB: I'll send you the link to the video on YouTube. And then, you know, as you proceed with this, just let me know if I can be of any help. S

M: Yeah, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And we'll definitely be in touch. I'm looking forward to looking through all those, the video and pictures and things.

AB: Great. Thank you. And I think it's wonderful that you're doing this. It's an enormous task. But you can probably come and make a nice book out of it.

SM: Yeah, certainly one day.

AB: One day you could put together the history of it. Okay, it was great. Thank you very much.

SM: It was really nice talking with you. Thank you.