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Biographical information, oral history transcripts, interviews by
Marc Lee Raphael with Dr. Irving M. Liebow and
Rabbi Benjamin Friedman, 1985.

March 5, 1985-Miami Beach

Rabbi Benjamin Friedman-Interviewed by Marc Lee Raphael

Well, I was born in 1894 and raised in Greenwich Village, N.Y. in Manhattan and...

MLR: What we call Greenwich Village.

Greenwich Village yes, and...in an old part of Manhattan not far from the North River which is called the Hudson River. My father had a hardware store, small, and since we occupied the entire building we lived above the hardware store having two floors with rooms on both floors owned by Trinity Church. We lived in a neighborhood where there were very few Jews, maybe six or eight Jewish families on Hudson St. and...the synagogue which I attended was the one on W. 4th St. In those days, the name of the synagogue was Derech Emunah and it later became the testing ground for many of the Yeshiva boys of the Jewish Theological Seminary who got an assignment every now and then to preach and to conduct the services at Derech Emunah. It was a well-endowed congregation because they owned a large proportion of the cemetery lots in New York, in Brooklyn and Staten Island. So there never was a problem of money that might of curtailed the activities. One of the Rabbi's whom I remember as having preached there was Max Arzt of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Since we lived in a neighborhood where there were no Jews, my mother had a Hebrew teacher come to Hudson St. to teach me and my four sisters (who are all prominent in the Herzl Club activities)--his name was Daniel Persky. Have you heard that name?

MLR: Sure.

A great, great Hebraist. He was then 18 years old and he would receive a dollar a lesson and he would come three or four times a week and teach us all but he primarily concentrated on me.

MLR: How old were you when you started to work with him?

When I started to work with him, I must have been...10 years old and I studied with him until I was 16 years old and went to Cincinnati, you know, to study to be a Rabbi. His influence was profound. Now I know how profound it is because I am a daily student of modern Hebrew, and I speak Hebrew, I think, as well as you could expect of somebody in my position.

Well, he taught me the Tanach; the original Tanach was something that I sent to a book binder to fix. My original Tanach which came just four or five days ago. I gotta show it to you; it's a Tanach with which I couldn't part. I paid \$75 for the bookbinding job on the Tanach, but it's my favorite Tanach, I just... It's my childhood Tanach. After a couple of years, when I must have been twelve years old Persky said to my mother, "I want to take Ben down to the East Side of New York and introduce him to a group of boys who just founded a society called the Dr. Herzl Zion Club, they meet on Saturday nights at 7:00." So every Saturday night thereafter I had a rendezvous with the Dr. Herzl Zion Club at 7:00 at the various places where we met. I wrote yesterday to Jake Marcus who asked me whether the Jewish Educational Alliance objected against the Dr. Herzl Zion Club meeting in their place because they were supposed to have their meetings in Hebrew to which they were opposed and they did not favor any youth organization of boys between, let me see, 12 and 15, that's how old we were at that time, who were Zionists. I wrote to Jake and said don't make too much of a fanfare of this thing. I remember that we applied to the Educational Alliance for meeting in their place and David Blaustein who was the director of the Educational Alliance had a predilection for these boys who read in Hebrew, who spoke Hebrew, ours

was Hebrew speaking society, and we grappled with the language and he appreciated the effort we were making to be both Zionists and so-called Hebraists at that period. We were able to meet at the Educational Alliance after we met in such places as a printing house and he had a room above where we'd meet on Saturday nights. Abba Hillel Silver's father was really the founder of the Dr. Herzl Club and the boys with whom I came in contact on the East Side were boys who later studied to be Rabbis. They were from the Volozhin Yeshiva; You know that Yeshiva?

MLR: Well, I have heard the name but nobody can find that in New York, nobody has heard of...

Well, it became the Yeshiva college. The Volozhin Yeshiva became the Yeshiva College which, Revel and Finkelstein...

MLR: Well, Yeshiva College was called Etz Chaim first and I haven't found a record...

These boys came, and this corroborates it, came to the Volozhin Yeshiva, I had no contact with the Volozhin Yeshiva as a matter of fact I had a certain kind of a snobbish feeling coming from the West Side to these "Yids" on the east side, but they are lifelong friends and memories. So...

MLR: Abba went to public school, and he went to a Yeshiva in the afternoons. But he went to...

His father was a teacher of the Yeshiva...

MLR: I don't think it was a Yeshiva called the Volozhin Yeshiva.

Well, maybe Etz Chaim, but to me it was the Volozhin and he corroborates.

MLR: I know he does, but I can't find any record. I've asked every Orthodox...person

That's right...

MLR: And nobody has heard of the Volozhin Yeshiva.

They've never heard of the Volozhin Yeshiva?

MLR: In Europe, not in America. You think there was a place?

Yes there was a place on the East Side which they called the Volozhin Yeshiva.

MLR: You don't know what street...

How do I remember it?

MLR: I'm sure you're right...

Yes, on Madison St.

MLR: On Madison St. Okay.

Madison St., so after I was there two or three weeks it was my turn to give a speech, we were great speechmakers, you know the kids between the ages of 12 and 16, 15 and 16, the...my first recitation which I gave was, [Quotes a line in Hebrew from Ethics of the Fathers] "Don't look at a picture, except what is in the picture." I never was good at Yiddish because I didn't live in a...my parents spoke Yiddish but I wasn't adept in Yiddish but I remember that we would translate the Hebrew into Yiddish and I didn't know much Yiddish. That was a great contribution to me, I remember at the age of 12—my God—and all of the boys were really good speakers because the club developed into the capacity to appear in public. The leader at all times and to this day was Abba Hillel Silver. That's where we got our Hebrew training.

MLR: Did you do anything with the boys other than Saturday nights or was it just...

Oh, picnics, we had picnics, oh, what picnics we had in Van Cortland Park, you know where Van Cortland Park is?

MLR: Sure.

And we'd go to these Zionist picnics that they held in Brooklyn, they were full of shit on...you couldn't sit down there was so much shit there. I remember that and my father sat along puddles.

MLR: You mention in your article different ways that the boys raised money for the club.

Yes, first the dues were five cents and each one gave a penny for the National Fund, the Jewish National Fund. We got to a stage where we realized that we should do more than just be like propaganda experts at our age. Abba Hillel Silver recognized very early in our life that it's enough talking let's have action. And the action consisted in raising some money for Zionist organizations. Ah...

MLR: Remember anything to do with synagogues, like, uh...you mention in the article selling, I don't know, raffle tickets?

We had three plays, you know about the plays?

MLR: Yes, the plays I know about.

In order to get an audience we used to organize ourselves into committees to go around the East Side; for example had Rivington St. the other DeLancey St., the Grand St., E. Broadway, Madison St., Cherry St. We would organize committees, I was on the committee with somebody else who could talk good Yiddish. I talked in Hebrew. We visited the various synagogues and our procedure was as follows: We'd knock on the door. Saturday night is when the Jews had their synagogue meetings, you know that?

MLR: Yes.

Saturday night, and we'd climb a flight of stairs to go to the synagogue, knock on the door and a fella would say: "What you want?" in Yiddish. But then our committee would show him the credentials for the Dr. Herzl Club. When he saw that it was in Hebrew, he said,

"I'll see the president," and he went over to the president, sure they have a free show. So they said sure come in. I was the one who started by talking in Hebrew. They knew some words but they didn't know what the hell I was talking about. Then the fellow would start in on Yiddish and explain what I was trying to convey and would they buy tickets, we were giving a play in Tomashefky's theater. I remember mine was "David at War"; I was short so they made me David...

MLR: You weren't Goliath?

No, I wasn't Goliath, Jessie Schwartz was Goliath.

MLR: Do you remember Saul Cohen?

I know him intimately.

MLR: Okay, because there are lots of letters from Saul Cohen to Abba.

He was the loyal layman of the group, so....

MLR: You sold these tickets though didn't you, they had to pay a few cents for a ticket?

What do you mean a few cents!, a dollar or something, fifty cents... We'd raise about four hundred dollars, you know, for the cause and in addition during intermission we had a speaker who'd represent the Jewish community like Masliansky, Barondess; You know these names?

MLR: Sure.

We tried to get Hillquit once but we had no... Golfaden was the playwright.

MLR: Silver used to go and hear Masliansky preach and he said he learned a great deal about preaching from him.

Sure, sure I remember being there.

MLR: That was on Friday nights.

On Friday nights. I remember being there when Masliansky was talking and a fire engine went by outside and you could hear the fire engine and Masliansky shouted "burning bush..."-- fire, then a fire in Judaism, you know...

MLR: I wanted to ask you something about David Blaustein and the Educational Alliance that you mentioned. You know that there is a story, I guess you tell it and others tell it, that Blaustein and someone else came to the meeting and told the boys to leave and Abba got up and gave this very impassioned speech about how Hebrew was the language of the prophets.

Now, I don't remember that, it may have been, but I don't remember, but I know that we conducted our meetings and Blaustein was sort of sympathetic but he had to deal with the American Jewish Committee crowd, they became the American Jewish Committee later but then there was a shift...they were sympathetic but they couldn't understand it, they didn't understand how you could have kids of 12 to 14, what they want to do.

MLR: You went to public school, didn't you?

Yes sir, three, PS-three.

MLR: And then to a...something like a high school?

Townsend-Harris school.

MLR: You went to Townsend-Harris, I didn't know that. Abba went to Townsend-Harris; now what years did you go to Townsend-Harris?

1908 to 1911.

MLR: Those are the exact years that he went there, did you know that?

Well...yes. Yes. I remember the course I took...what the hell, we had no guidance, I took French, German and Spanish. He took Latin

and Greek.

MLR: Right, I have his transcript from Townsend-Harris High School. I found the old records of the high school. Now, do you remember much about Townsend-Harris? Most of the, most of the boys were preparing for college that went to Townsend-Harris?

I went to Townsend-Harris because there was a rule in New York in those days that only the smart boys of the graduating class of public schools could go to Townsend-Harris, not everyone could go. I come from an Irish neighborhood which there were no boys who wanted to go to high school except a fella, John Flannigan, John Flannigan and I went to Townsend-Harris Hall.

MLR: I see. Now you went from Townsend-Harris in 1911 to the Hebrew Union College.

Yes.

Now, again you write about this in your article but tell me something about why you think the Zionist, Orthodox boys went to this anti-Zionist Reform school?

Well, the man who had a great influence upon us was Magnes.

MLR: Is that a fire alarm?

Yes, that's been going on too often, there's some older people that when they cook...

MLR: OH, the smoke turns it on.

So,...what were we talking about?

MLR: Why these boys went to HUC.

They went to HUC because Magnes was a rabbi and a Zionist and that had a great influence on us. Besides we didn't know anything about Reform, we didn't know a damn thing.

MLR: But there was Schechter and his Seminary; why not just stay

home and go to his Zionist seminary?

That was the influence, let me see what...

[Left the apartment because of the alarm and interrupted the interview]

MLR: Why HUC and not the seminary?

Well first of all they were poor, everybody -- they didn't have any money like today, you know, every Jew has money in some way. And they offered a scholarship, they had the money that they collected originally for the Isaac M. Wise school in N.Y. and when Temple Emmanuel stopped supporting the Isaac M. Wise enterprise there was a sum of money that was left that was to be devoted to young boys, young men whothey offered scholarships, I remember I had to be interviewed, I was 16 and a half, to be interviewed by Dr. Joseph Silverman who was then rabbi of Temple Emmanuel, and I think he was what they would call in a nice language an am ha-aretz because he said to me can you translate for me that passage from Isaiah ..."virgins shall be born unto us", I was 16 and a half and I didn't know what a virgin was yet and I translated it in a manner that convinced me that he didn't know much Hebrew, I could tell. And we had to go to see a man connected with the committee by the name of Arnold who was a lawyer in New York, a German-Jewish lawyer, you know who kind of thought that this is a bunch of cock-eyed kids trying to study to be rabbis, they were brokers, these fellas were brokers. But he gave us 300 dollars a year for expenses so to speak, to go to Cincinnati. So many of us went probably just because we got a scholarship. There wasn't any business over ideology. Later when Judaism developed a little bit in four or five years in those days some of the boys did think in terms of the Theological Seminary, like Jessie Schwartz. He

went to the Seminary, but most of the boys who studied to be rabbis went to HUC, but some of them went into cognate areas like education, you see; Chipkin, quite a boy, longwinded bugger, oh gosh- I invited him up to Syracuse once to give a speech because I thought it would be nice, he spoke for two hours, and I said to him, "Israel why did you do that?", he said, "I didn't cover the subject!"

MLR: Do you feel that some of your own, well let me not ask you...you know Abba Hillel Silver attributes his interest in social justice and prophetic ideals to his boyhood on the Lower East Side. Was there an influence, in your case on your, on your Rabbinate, on your...?

My connection with Israel is primarily a lingual connection, I love Hebrew, through hebrew I love everything that's connected with Hebrew see. No I don't think that there was anything on the East Side except his father's influence, his father was a learned man, but a spiritual man and later I think Abba Hillel enabled his father and mother to go to Israel to live there and live out their days.

MLR: Yes.

His father wrote a book.

MLR: Yes a commentary to Genesis.

Abba Hillel was quite understanding of his brother Maxwell because Maxwell had a propensity to deliver papers on Jewish subjects, he liked to have an audience to read to what he contributed and I remember the boys used to try to squelch it and Abba Hillel I remember saying to us, I recall, that he likes it, he likes it, let him do it.

MLR: This would be at rabbinical school.

No that was before when we were members of the club.

MLR: When you were boys in the club, I see.

He said, he likes to, why don't you let him , he was very nice that way.

MLR: Do you remember his dad pretty well at the club?

Yes, I remember him.

MLR: You didn't study hebrew with Moses Silver, did you?

No, no, no no, no. But I read his Perush. He wrote a Perush, you know that?

MLR: Yes. What else do you remember about Abba as a boy?

Abba was always a leader, a leader without question a leader. As I look back, you know...

MLR: Despite his personality, or his intelligence or...

He never indulged in sports, never. He hadn't any inclination as I had you know to play baseball, basketball, so forth. But he became absorbed in Zionism.

Palm Springs, California, January 29, 1985

Dr. Iving M. Liebow, M.D., discussing reminiscences and reflections on Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

My first memory of him will tell you nothing of him as a person. I simply remember him as my mother's younger brother whom my mother had along on a vacation when he was vacationing from school. I was then a very young child, perhaps three or four years old. I remember the incident; I remember nothing else about it. And that's all I really remember until later in my life when I was away at school, at which time I was very well aware of the fact that he was a very important person in the Jewish movement. I saw him once or twice in Philadelphia when I was a student at the University of Pennsylvania and he came to lecture in town. I remember very well his giving me five dollars when I called on him, which in those days was a fortune, particularly for a relatively penurious student.

MLR: This would be the late 20s, the early 30s?

No, this would have been the early 30s, because I graduated from college in 1933. And that's all really that I remember until I came to Cleveland as a medical student in September of '33.

MLR: Let me go back. Would he have come to your Bar Mitzvah? Is that possible?

Oh, I think he did. I think he and Uncle Max both came. This apparently was an important event in the family.

MLR: But you don't remember him at the Bar Mitzvah.

Not really. Ah, vaguely, now that you mention, ask whether or not he was there, I remember that he was, but that's all I remember. Uncle Maxwell was there. That's all I remember.

MLR: When you went to Cleveland as a medical student, was he

living on Lakeshore Drive in Bratenahl at that time?

Yes.

MLR: Do you remember that house at all?

Oh, indeed, yes, I do.

MLR: Tell me something about it, how you remember it.

Oh, well, I remember it as one of three on an estate belonging to a family whose name I've forgotten--I shouldn't, but I've forgotten the name.

MLR: Gries?

No, it was not Gries. It was Moss, Herman Moss, whom Danny called Memaw, the woman, Memaw Moss. It belonged to the Mosses. Behind them was the fenced-in estate of three homes. The westernmost one was empty; the Mosses occupied the middle one; and the Silvers occupied the one to the east. Years later they left that home because I guess they needed larger accommodations, and moved around the corner onto 105th Street, a little closer to the lake. That was a huge white frame house as I remember.

MLR: Do you remember the style of living in either one of those houses? Florence Bernstein remembers some servants or chauffeurs.

Oh, yes. Oh, they had very adequate help. I remember a cook; I remember Clara who was the maid; and I remember the combination chauffeur-butler. They maintained only one car, a Chevrolet, but the chauffeur chauffeured it back and forth so that there was a good deal of use out of it. The style of living was that of an affluent family. I don't think they were unreasonable about the manner of life. I think it was one to which perhaps Aunt Virginia had become accustomed and one which was necessitated by Uncle Abba's being busy all the time and very often away from home.

MLR: Were you there for dinner from time to time?

Very often. My first year particularly I was there for dinner every Sunday.

MLR: Tell me something about a Sunday dinner at the Silver's.

Sunday dinner at the Silver's was always a pleasure because the cook was excellent. I remember that Uncle Abba savored dishes that are traditionally Jewish, perhaps Hungarian Jewish, I don't know. I don't think Aunt Virginia cared for them as much, but she would favor him every once in a while by having the cook prepare them. Not potato pancakes--she made her own version of them, like little potato kugel, small, little ones, miniature, which were delicious. Dinner was always good. Following dinner, I remember, Uncle Abba would give his sons their Hebrew lesson.

MLR: On Sunday evenings?

On Sunday, well, it was really afternoon. I would chat with Aunt Virginia, perhaps listen to some music, and then go home to study.

MLR: Did they pick you up at...

Well, I met them at the Temple and would go with them in the car, and then I would take the streetcar home.

MLR: I see. What was Abba like at dinner? Any recollection? Would he dominate a dinner?

No, no. He was not dominant in the way that I understand he was in public. Not at all. Very much a father of the family, with dinner very often interrupted by phone calls, almost routinely interrupted by phone calls, long-distance phone calls.

MLR: Do you remember a sense of humor?

Oh, yes, very definitely, a very definite sense of humor. I don't remember now what kind, but he had a very definite sense of humor.

Dinner was a pleasant affair, I'll say that.

MLR: Would you go to the Temple from time to time, to his lecture at the Temple on Sundays?

I would go Sundays, not because I'm a religious person—I was not. But, first of all, in the beginning because I think it was expected of me by my parents and reasonably by the Silvers. I think it would have been remiss of me not to show as their new nephew in town. But later on I went because I was interested in hearing him speak. He could mesmerize you. It was a treat just to listen to him. I never heard anybody quite like that before.

MLR: What was it? Was it the message, or the delivery?

Well, sometimes it wasn't the message, because he would give a book review. But he had a deep resonant voice. He had not only good enunciation but good diction—his choice of words, excellent. I always admired a person like that because I don't have that capacity myself; I can never write well, and I never had any training in public speaking. So I always admired somebody who was that good. He was also fearless when it came to principle, and that was interesting.

MLR: Would you have any recollection of this just informally—I mean, do you ever recall conversation with him over an issue...

No, there wasn't that much time for chatting, really. I didn't have it; he didn't have it. I was there for dinner and to spend time with the family, but then his time had to be spent with the boys. I'd chat with Aunt Virginia, we'd have a few words afterward, and then I was getting anxious about my own books. Because being away for that many hours was like cheating; I felt very uneasy.

MLR: Now you come back a decade later or so as a physician. Does he immediately begin to come to you as a patient?

I don't recall that. I don't recall that. Aunt Virginia's physician at the time was one of the old-time physicians, Dr. Peskin. She remained loyal to him until it was apparent that he was a little old, and then she became a patient. He did eventually; I don't remember precisely when.

MLR: Tell me something about him medically. Did he seem to be a man in good health?

He was a man in good health. I think he was a man who would not admit to illness. He didn't like the discussion of it and had no time to be sick.

MLR: Now, he had an enormous appetite.

Yes, he did. He enjoyed food.

MLR: That seems clear from people I spoke to. They recalled late evening meals.

Well, I wasn't with him at those times. I remember he enjoyed Sunday dinner very much.

MLR: Was your sense that he had a weight problem?

Oh, I know he did. He was overweight. Of course he was. He was paunchy. He had the thin limbs of the Silver family, but he was paunchy.

MLR: Do you think he ever got any kind of exercise? Was anything like that ...

I don't think so. I don't think he had the time or the inclination.

MLR: He probably walked a good deal.

Perhaps so.

MLR: So you were his physician probably during the 1950s and into the early 60s?

I think, yes.

MLR: He died in 1963.

Um, hmmm.

MLR: Maybe for a decade, or so?

Oh, yes, I would say so.

MLR: Did you have a chance to see him socially outside of the office in that period?

Not much. I married in '47 and I would say no. Certain family occasions, yes; some of the holidays--I think I have some movies of that--but basically not.

MLR: Did any of your children go to the Temple?

Oh, yes. Both of them.

MLR: So you would go there for some life cycle occasions?

Oh, for the Temple occasions--

MLR: Confirmation, or--

The simple, formal occasions, oh, sure. Both my children were confirmed at the Temple.

MLR: Do you have any recollection of Silver as a rabbi in the 50s that might be different from the 1930s?

No, as a matter of fact, my memory is that the times were very much the same. He was very devoted to the congregation and also very busy with Zionism. And I think that combination can be epitomized by one--the occasion of my first airplane flight, as a matter of fact. I had a phone call from my father early one Sunday morning. Uncle Abba was flying to New York on a chartered plane and I could have a ride home. I didn't have the money to go home for Easter vacation. But here was a free plane ride, and I didn't know quite what he meant. But it was a plane to take him to Newark to welcome Einstein to the

United States. Now Uncle Abba would not leave his congregation, even for that occasion. So he was at the congregation, gave his lecture, ended the service at the usual time. We dashed out into a waiting cab that took us to the airport to a chartered plane; pilot, co-pilot, and a hostess and two passengers, and we flew to Newark. It was my first flight. I remember it very well for a number of reasons. The flight took two and one-half hours. We were met at the airport by a police escort and routed in a great big hurry through the center of Newark to the Newark Armory where he welcomed Einstein to the United States at about 3:15 or 3:30 in the afternoon. It was wild. So I had a free plane flight east, and, not having any money, I had to take the bus back, and this was before the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Twenty hours coming back over the Pennsylvania mountains. Two and one-half hours going, twenty hours coming back. I'll never forget it.

MLR: Well, do you remember anything--

But, to me it epitomizes his sense of responsibility to the congregation and yet his--devotion is hardly the word--but, well, his devotion to Zionism and, I think, probably indirectly welcoming Einstein had to do with this.

MLR: That plane ride and that whole event is written up in several newspapers.

You're kidding! I remember it; I'll tell you more about it later.

MLR: No, go ahead.

No.

MLR: I'm very familiar with the event itself. Now, on a plane ride like that, would he have conversed with you, chatted with you for some of that time?

I was too ill. I was not feeling good.

MLR: From your first plane ride? And the movement?

Or the night before.

MLR: What else do you remember about him, now, as a family man?

I think he was too busy to be the attentive family person in terms of being at all occasions. He was very generous. I remember when I ran into financial difficulty in medical school; I needed some money. He was good enough to let me have it and refused to accept repayment. This was a gift; he made that very clear. It was enough to tide me over a very tough spot. My dad was in financial difficulty at the time and I was running behind in my room and board at the boarding house. Very generous that way.

MLR: Were you ever together with Abba and Virginia and the boys doing anything?

At dinner. No, not in any family outing, but around the home, yes. The boys were very young, understand. When I got there as a medical student I think Danny was four or five and Raphael was two or three; there was no conviviality in the sense of playing

MLR: I was thinking now of the 40s and the 50s.

In the 40s I was away. 50s--

MLR: Well, you came back--

When I came back the boys were off to college. Danny was off to rabbinical school. They weren't around really.

MLR: Did you and your wife ever do anything with the Silvers socially?

No.

MLR: Would you ever have gone east for a family occasion of any kind?

Not much during my marriage.

MLR: When you were living around Shaker Square in the late 40s, he was already living in Shaker Heights. Abba and his family were living in Shaker Heights by that time.

Yes. They moved, I think, during the war, at the end of the war.

MLR: Would you have gone over to that house from time to time?

Oh, yes. I lived there, as a matter of fact. When I came back out of the army I had no place to go, couldn't find a place to live. The meanest apartment was hard to find. Aunt Virginia most generously invited me to live until I could find a place. I lived there for six weeks. As a matter of fact, she found me a place through one of her real estate friends. So I lived in that Shaker Heights home for six weeks. The boys were there then, but they were still young. Raphael was in high school; I think Danny was away at college at the time.

MLR: Would you have spent your days at that time looking for a place to live or were you working?

I was in practice...

MLR: By that time, I see.

Yes, I had started practice and Aunt Virginia had one of her friends, a lady friend who was in real estate, bird-dogging, and she found an apartment down on Euclid Avenue, and I moved out after six weeks.

MLR: Was this a general practice that you had?

Internal medicine.

MLR: Did the boys come to you?

No, no, they were pediatric age. Danny became, Danny and Raphael became my patients years later when they were grown.

MLR: Did you remember anything about living in their house for those six weeks? Did you have dinner with them on a regular basis?

Oh, every night.

MLR: Any recollections about Virginia?

Not many, strangely. We had one or two occasions that I remember, and I have movies of those, but I don't remember any specific meals while I lived there. I remember being there for several occasions. Aunt Virginia was good enough to put on the wedding for my baby sister in her home. My sister Naomi, Naomi Schwartz, now lives in McLain, Virginia. Sometime when you're in we'll go over some of those.

MLR: Those would be interesting movies to see.

Mm, hum. You'll see them.

MLR: That would be a lot of fun. In the evening would you play cards, was there any kind of recreational activity?

No, not that I recall. I'm trying to remember, but I think not. Mostly I chatted with Aunt Virginia. I'm trying to remember Uncle Abba those evenings, but I don't.

MLR: Probably busy with something connected with work.

Always. Phone calls or away. Very often away from home. I've seen him in the midst of a Sunday dinner in that home, get a phone call, get up and start packing and leave. Being involved in that kind of movement was--I was going to say all-consuming--it wasn't, because he made certain that his congregation didn't suffer his absence too much, but it took up a great deal of his life. He'd be on the road on short notice for two, three weeks.

MLR: You were never involved in--you never went with him to this thing or that--

No, no--

MLR: I mean, to a movie--

No, sorry--

MLR: Or to a delicatessen, somebody used to go and have lunch with him at 105th and Euclid at a delicatessen.

Well, that was probably from the Temple when the Temple was still down there. They ate lunch in the area. No, I was never involved in that.

MLR: Would some of your relatives come to town from time to time that might get together with the Silvers?

Well, I'm trying to remember. I don't offhand. My folks were almost never there because they had a new little girl in the family, my baby sister. I was 17 years older than she. My folks were not there. And Pearl was gone. I don't recall Uncle Max coming. Aunt Rose I think on one or two occasions, but that's all.

MLR: Would your parents ever come and visit you in Cleveland?

No, they came for my graduation. That was about all.

MLR: From medical school.

Yes.

MLR: That was in late 30s.

'37.

MLR: Do you remember Abba there? I mean, any recollection of Abba at your graduation?

No.

MLR: Did you have a little party or something after?

No. No, I don't remember that either. Well, no, you see, I was already interning. My internship began on June 15 and I graduated on June 16.

MLR: I see. You were busy.

I was busy. I had to be excused from internship to come graduate.

MLR: Do you remember any of their cars? The Chevrolet. Do you

remember...

Very modest. It was the standard four-door Chevrolet. Very simple that way.

MLR: Abba usually had a driver?

Yes, he did. I don't ever remember him driving.

MLR: So the driver would take you from the Temple to the house right after services.

Right. That one car was very much used.

MLR: This was an afternoon kind of dinner. I mean, it was a late lunch, early supper...

Aunt Virginia called it lunch, but really it was a Sunday dinner. The Temple would be out at what? noon, we'd get in the car, come home, sit down.

MLR: So by the late afternoon you were back home.

Oh, yeah, I couldn't stand it.

MLR: So you took a streetcar back from the house?

Yes. The 105th Street car. I lived five minutes off 105th Street. Do you know Cleveland?

MLR: Uh, huh.

Do you know where University Circle is? In relation to 105th Street?

MLR: Yes.

Well, I lived one block up from Severance Hall.

MLR: Off of Euclid?

Yes.

MLR: I see. So right across the street from the University.

Right across the street from the medical school. One hundred yards away.

MLR: I see. Did you ever wonder about this? This may not be something you ever thought about. A number of people are surprised that Abba didn't move to Israel when Israel became a state in 1948. Would that be something that you would have ever imagined because of his passionate commitment to Zionism, that he might have done?

Oh, it's conceivable. I don't see that ...It's hard to say. I would have been surprised if he had, frankly. Here this person was, although not born in the United States, reared in the United States. His whole upbringing was there; his whole feeling was there. He gave of himself in the creation of the state, but I don't see why that would demand that he move there, give up his U.S. citizenship, or necessarily become a citizen of Israel. I don't see that one necessitates the other. I never bothered about it. I heard that criticism; I never felt that it was justified.

MLR: I don't mean it any way as a criticism.

No, I know you, but others did.

MLR: I see. A number of relatives...

As a matter of fact, I think Ben Gurion queried that, did he not?

MLR: Yes.

Anybody interested in Israel ought to come here. Well, that's a little chauvinistic, I don't think that's true. If I give some money for, say, national preservation for some building in Chicago, it doesn't mean I have to move there. Or if I want to back the rebuilding of downtown Cleveland doesn't mean I move out of Shaker Heights and move down to central Cleveland to show that I really feel it. I don't see that. I think that he might well have been able to do less living in Israel than living out of Israel and stimulating the interest where he lived for the development of Israel.

MLR: Did your dad talk very much, did your mom or dad talk very much about Abba? Did you ever have conversations--

No, you see, I left home at any early age. I was gone at 16 and for practical purposes never really got back, perhaps two weeks at a time once or twice a year. Went off to college, worked during the summers; really came home just for the Christmas vacation and the Easter vacation. And then off to medical school and never had the money to come. I came home that Easter on that plane ride. That was my first trip; I didn't have the money to come home at Christmas. So I really saw very little of my folks and when I got home that summer went off to a job.

MLR: I was thinking maybe in the last few years, conversations with your dad. Even since you've been out in California, would Abba's name have come up in any... In talking with your dad, does he ever tell you an anecdote or two or anything about the Silvers?

No, no, I don't recall any.

MLR: Anything else come to your mind about Abba that I'm not asking you that you think would be worth sharing?

No, the only thing that I remember was his generosity, not only to me personally but, from what you told me today, to others. I wasn't aware of it to Uncle Max, to Jack. To my grandparents I was well aware of it, because I think he bought them the home and saw that they were well ensconced there and well taken care of. I think probably aside from the obvious forceful personality, his total dedication to both congregation and Israel, would be his generosity.

MLR: OK. Thanks.