

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN I. BILDNER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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LIVINGSTON, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Allen I. Bildner on June 12, 2008, in Livingston, New Jersey, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

Paul Clemens: ... Paul Clemens.

SH: Thank you, Mr. Bildner, so much for taking time out of what I know is a very busy schedule to talk with us today.

AB: Thank you, Sandra, and, Paul, I really appreciate the opportunity you made possible in doing this.

PC: Thank you.

SH: Let us start with your family background; for the record, can you tell me where and when you were born?

AB: I was born in Maspeth, Long Island, New York, on the second floor of a building, over a tailor shop.

SH: When was this?

AB: This was August 16, 1926.

SH: Can you tell me your father's name and a little bit about his family background?

AB: Yes, right. My dad's name was Joseph Bildner, Joe Bildner, and Dad was born in the United States. My mother, whose maiden name was Wasserman, Rebecca Wasserman Bildner, her nickname was Bea, for Beatrice, (she must have used this name instead of Rebecca all of her life), was born in Austria, came here when she was a year old. ... When I was born, we lived in Maspeth, Long Island. Maspeth, Long Island, a very low economic community in Queens and most of the residents there were Slavic, were foreign-born and Slavic, and that's where we lived in those early days.

SH: Did they talk about their families' immigration stories, why they moved and where they moved from?

AB: No. They didn't talk about it very much, but, over the years, I had retained a domestic genealogist and an Eastern European genealogist to track ... our roots, and Mom and Dad had told us a little bit, but not very much, and details were filled in. ... The interesting thing is, I have the ship certificates and photographs. Mom's father was Louis Wasserman and his wife, Leah, lived, and Mom was born, in Galicia. Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in those days, and, today, Galicia would be part of the Ukraine.

PC: Ukraine, yes.

AB: ... Dad's family was also in Galicia and the town that he was in, which I think was Sniatyn, was about fifteen miles from the German border, and the Jewish population there, you know, the *shtetls*, they were there because the Germans came over the border to buy from the Jewish merchants in those days. Dad's father was in the wholesale butter and egg business on the other side and, when he first immigrated to the United States, he had a stall in the Washington Public Market in New York. That was the old public market, which I was in, you know, when I was a kid.

PC: Where was that?

AB: Downtown, the old Washington Public Market. ...

PC: In Washington Square? Is that where it was?

AB: No, way, way downtown, around Houston Street, right on the other side of the Holland Tunnel. ... It was one of the public markets, you know, that exist throughout the world, to this day, especially in Europe, Japan, stalls, marvelous fruit and marvelous steak and marvelous products of all kinds, individual concessionaires, but, of course, that all disappeared as time went on. Then, Dad met my mother, I guess she was sixteen at the time, when he was working in a delicatessen. A little while after that, this would be 1917, Dad and two brothers bought a grocery store in the Ridgewood section of Brooklyn, and that's the picture that's on the wall out there, and the person in that picture is my Uncle Morris, Moe, standing in front of it. Then, their older brother, Ben, whom we called "Bad Uncle Ben," and I'll explain that later, was a supervisor for the A&P. ... These were the days of the small service stores, in which there were ladders and things to reach for, you know, just pure service stores. He was a supervisor for the A&P and the only Jew in the A&P organization. He apparently saved enough money, and then, when Michael Cullen opened up King Kullen, in 1930, he, Benjamin Bildner, hired my father and ... his two other brothers, Moe and Dave, to join him in opening up the first Big Ben Supermarket in Long Island, and Big Ben opened up within a week of the time that Mike Cullen opened up. Mike Cullen's logo was, "King Kullen, World's Biggest Price Wrecker." Big Ben was, "Big Ben, Never Undersold," and, when Ben used to meet Mike Cullen in the street, Mike would say to him, "I'm going to bury you, you little Jew bastard. I'm going to bury you." You know, those were the days anti-Semitism ran amuck. Well, by 1935, ... the four Bildner brothers had fifteen stores in Long Island, under the name Big Ben. Those were early days and they were very, very successful, but Ben was a very, very difficult person. He was married, but had a mistress, but, in those days, divorce was less possible in any religion or in any family and my Aunt Ceil refused to give him a divorce. ... By the time she died, his mistress was forty, so, he dumped her, and wound up with a seventeen-year-old, and that was my uncle. My cousin, Albert, who's twelve years older than I am, was seduced by some woman who then was in her twenties, and, after his experience, his first sexual experience, he asked, "Well, why did you go after me?" and she told him, "Your father, Ben, hired me, I'm a hooker, to teach you something about sex." [laughter] Now, this was Ben, but what Ben was able to do was to surround himself with really competent people. Now, I had only met Ben once in my life, when I was fifteen, and I remember he sent me a gift of a football on my fifteenth birthday. But, you can imagine how my mother and father felt about him, because, in 1935, Dad led two brothers and my mother out to New Jersey ... and, in 1936, they opened up the first Kings Super Market in New Jersey. They had had a terrible

falling out with my uncle and never spoke to him again. Ben was unable to identify my father when called upon by the police in Bal Harbour, Florida, when Dad died in 1973.

SH: Was this because they came to New Jersey?

AB: No, no. It really wasn't clear what it was, but you can imagine that Ben ... had many distractions from this business and he was a very difficult person to deal with. One of the things that I thought was fascinating, the only time I met my uncle, again, was in a retirement home in Florida. He then was celebrating his hundredth birthday and I decided that, ... while he was still here, I wanted to learn something from him, directly, about the business, about what happened to Bildner Brothers, and one of the things that I learned, first of all, he was illiterate. He couldn't write or read and, yet, he was able to found this business and build it. He told me that whatever success Big Ben had, my father was responsible for. My father was the "people person" in the business. So, I did meet Ben, and then, I told him, "I'd like to know what the circumstances were when you did break up the partnership, because my mother said that you stole the business from my father and his brothers and you only paid them ten thousand apiece, and there were fifteen stores." He said, "First of all, they were not my partners, they were my employees, but I agreed to give them one-third for sweat and I would take two-thirds for sweat and capital. So, I figured the business was worth 540,000 dollars at the time, so, I gave them one-third of that." ... I think he said he gave them ... \$80,000. "I gave them one-third of that and your mother is wrong." After Mom died, when I went through her papers and everything that she had, I found the dissolution of Bildner Brothers among the papers, and it wasn't one-third of 540, nor was it ten thousand; it was about forty thousand apiece. [laughter]

PC: Can I take you back for, first, a quick question, then, a follow up?

AB: Yes.

PC: You did not happen to hear Omer Bartov when he came and spoke at Rutgers. [Editor's Note: Dr. Omer Bartov spoke at Rutgers University earlier this year on the history of Jewish communities in Galicia and his recently published book *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*.]

AB: Yes, I did, yes.

PC: You did. Was that about the period?

AB: Oh, yes.

PC: That is what it sounded like.

AB: Oh, yes. ... There's Omer's book right there.

PC: Yes, I have read it. Some of your family was lost in Galicia, probably, as far as you have been able to determine.

AB: We're sure of it, but we have not been able to track either Mom's or Dad's family. I served on the Holocaust Council for five years, so, I had opportunities in addition to the opportunities anybody else had, but I could never make the connection in any of their records. Yet, when our genealogist went abroad, we found Bildners and Wassermans and Shulmans, the other family name, but we could never make the connection to our family, and that was because the Nazis had destroyed the archives in those communities.

PC: They destroyed everything, from what Omer said.

AB: Yes.

PC: Yes, that was what I was wondering

AB: By the way, at some point, if you're interested, I have photographs of the communities that they were in, that were taken when the genealogist went over there. You know, the Nazis used the tombstones for sidewalks and those kinds of things, yes.

SH: For the record, do you want to state the name of Professor Bartov's book?

PC: I have that. I have read it, but I am bad on titles, *Erased*, that is the part I remember, *Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*.

SH: I always thought that was the most wonderful title, that *Erased*.

AB: Yes.

PC: It was an incredible talk.

AB: Now, ... as Dad and his brothers were able to do better and move from the lower economic class to, say, more middle-class, we moved into nicer homes, first, in Oceanside, Long Island, and then, Rockville Center and Baldwin. When we lived in Baldwin, Long Island, I was in grade school there, until 1936, when we moved to Summit, New Jersey.

SH: You would have been in fourth grade.

AB: I was going into fifth grade.

SH: Are you the only child?

AB: No. ...

SH: You talked about your father and mother moving, but did the other two uncles and their families come as well?

AB: Oh, yes, I'll tell you that right now. ... It was 1936, when ... we had a home at 129 Mountain Avenue in Summit. We had everything moved in and, now, we were moving in for

the first time. We came down Springfield Avenue and, there, across the street, was the banner, "Alf Landon for President." [laughter] ... This is Roosevelt's first term, right. Now, Summit, in those days, was a hundred percent WASP, Episcopalian, Protestant, Presbyterian. There was a small Catholic church there. Most of the Catholics were Italian Catholics, so, they were outside of the mainstream of the community. I entered in the fifth [grade]. Oh, by the way, we put our heads out the window, I was ten, my sister was nine; we knew our [parents] were Democrats. I never knew [of] any activity on their part, but I knew they wanted Roosevelt elected. Those were the Depression days and everybody was suffering, including them, and we put our heads out, "Boo, boo." "Put your heads back in here." [laughter] By the way, we never knew where the name Kings [came] from. I've often been asked and I finally concluded that either Dad wanted a name that was more Gentile and was afraid that Bildner, which was German, might be seen as Jewish, or he and his brothers were so excited about getting away from their older brother that they wanted to do something majestic, something royal, and that's where the name Kings [came from], and either are possible. ...

SH: I wondered about King Kullen.

AB: Yes.

SH: Was it derivative from that?

AB: No, not at all. ...

SH: Before we start talking about Kings and your time in New Jersey, you spoke about the communities that you lived in on Long Island. You said the first one was very Slavic. Were your father's brothers always in the same community that you lived in?

AB: No.

SH: Was there an extended family?

AB: ... My grandfather, Dad's father, had died, ... many years [earlier]. I never had met him and he died when Dad was very young. ... I think his name was Abraham, because my Hebrew name is Abraham Isaac and I was named after him. He, apparently, was abusive and an alcoholic, died very, very young. My grandmother lived in Lynbrook, Long Island, and there was a Big Ben store there. ... Like so many families, especially immigrant families, ethnic families, from the other side, Sunday was a day on which the families would congregate around the matriarch and the patriarch, and so, it was quite customary for everyone in the family to visit my grandmother, Sarah, in Lynbrook. Now, Dad's two brothers remained bachelors for years. Moe died a bachelor. Uncle Dave married, I think, after the war, in about 1948 or '49. So, both [were] bachelor sons, right through their adulthood, and, while they were working, [in] business, in Big Ben, lived with my grandmother, in Lynbrook, Long Island. My grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side, ... Louis and Lena Wasserman, lived in Maspeth, Long Island, until they died. They lived in that very modest home, where they grew grapes, Concord grapes, and Grandpa used to make his own wine and we'd visit them often. I didn't like to visit, and neither did Joan, because ... the Newtown Creek was in Maspeth, Long Island, and, if you

were within ten miles of the Newtown Creek, you had to hold your nose. [laughter] I think it's been cleaned up a lot since that time. So, now, we moved to New Jersey. Now, this is 129 Mountain Avenue; ... I was ten, my sister was nine, my father, both bachelor brothers, ... my mother's brother and sister-in-law and five-year-old child, my mother's sister-in-law's sister, ten in the household, no help. My mother would get up at, never later than five, to get my sister and me off to school and the men off to the one store in Summit, which was the first store. Then, she would go to the Kings Super Market, where she was the bookkeeper and cashier. She would start back at about four o'clock in the afternoon, to make dinner for us and for the men, and Mom did that; I'll be in tears. I cry easily, Sandra; sorry.

SH: That is okay.

AB: She did that year after year. She had a third child. I was thirteen when she had a child who, unfortunately, was born with "water on the brain." I've forgotten the technical name, nowadays.

SH: Down syndrome?

AB: No, it wasn't Down syndrome. ...

SH: Hydro ...

AB: Yes, hydrocephalus. ... Nowadays, you use a shunt and children live and no problem, but she had surgery and she died a month later. ... So, that would have been three years afterwards and my mother never recovered, physically, from that, or, for that matter, emotionally, but she continued to follow that schedule for some time. One of the things that was helpful is that my mother's sister-in-law's sister was more like an indentured servant than she was a guest, because she helped Mom with the housework, she took care of us when my mother was not there and she lived with us for years. Her name was Gladys Warshaw. My sister and I always felt very badly about it, because she didn't have a life of her own. ... Many years later, we learned, after she'd left, that she'd been married and had her own family and, of course, that made us feel very, very happy. So, both bachelors lived with us, and Mom's brother also had a job at Kings Super Market. That's why he was living there, too.

SH: Where in Summit was the supermarket?

AB: ... Springfield Avenue.

SH: It was on the same avenue.

AB: Right, yes, right where, I don't know [if] you remember where the S&H [Green] Stamp Company was? As you enter town, coming from Millburn to Springfield, it was right at the beginning of town. ...

PC: As an aside, that store was still there in the 1950s, was it not?

AB: Oh, yes.

PC: Yes, because I was in it.

AB: Oh, yes. [laughter]

PC: I had family in Summit, an uncle who would fit your model, an Episcopalian, a very conservative Republican. [laughter] My family was Democratic. We would go there cautiously, but we went to that store in the late 1950s. I remember it.

AB: Yes. You know, I entered fifth grade, I was ten years old, I had never experienced any anti-Semitism. I didn't even know what anti-Semitism was, you know, by the time I started [fifth grade].

SH: Even coming from the areas out on Long Island?

AB: No.

SH: Wonderful.

AB: No. It's possible that my parents did and I wasn't aware of it, and my grandparents did. Digressing just for a moment. My grandfather was a deserter from the Austrian Army, Joan's grandfather, on her father's side, was a deserter from the Russian Army, and, remember, ... when [the] Vietnam War broke out and kids were being drafted, ... both my sons said to my mother, as the young did; you know, the young seemed to know better about Mr. Nixon and about the Vietnam War than we did. I lied about hay fever to get into the United States Navy in World War II, and both kids had said, "Mom, we're not serving. We'll go to Canada, we'll go to Puerto Rico." So, Joan said, "Look, sons, Allen's grandfather was a deserter from the Austrian Army, my grandfather, on my father's side, was a deserter from the Russian Army, so, you two will join the club." [laughter] Well, as it happened, they both had draft numbers. ... You remember, it was a lottery.

PC: Oh, yes.

AB: Rob's was twelve and Jim's thirty-five, Rob was three years older. Kingman Brewster, [Jr., President of Yale University (1963-1977)] refused to permit the drafting of the students, which he was able to do, until they finished their college education. ... That was the only reason that Rob wasn't drafted, and, by the time Jim was ready, the war was over at that time. But, at ten years old, I was in school, ... Brayton School in Summit, no more than two weeks and, suddenly, two of my classmates, on a rainy day, beat me up, put my face in the mud, "Go home, you little Jewboy, go home, rabbi." I went home crying. I had never experienced anything like that. That was my introduction to Summit. ... Those were the days. ... I was thirteen, my sister was twelve; we could not enter the Virginia Wolf ballroom dancing program. You know, Virginia Wolf was an organization that ran ballroom dancing for students in schools, but Jews were not permitted. There were girls I could date and there were girls I couldn't date, because their parents would not [permit it].

SH: Going back to that incident ...

AB: Yes.

SH: What did your parents advise you to do when you came home? Were you sent back the next day?

AB: Yes.

SH: Did they give you any advice when you came home, having been beaten up like that?

AB: The first question I recall asking them is, "Why? What's wrong with us?" and they tried to explain that the problem was not ours, but theirs. "That's just ignorance and you will run into that from time-to-time, because there are people who are that way, and the important thing for you is to recognize that you're not the problem," but, having told me that, I can tell you, because I grew up with what I experienced in Summit, and, when all the kids were going to Sunday school; there were three Jews in the class in Summit. There were 175 in our class. Four of them were Jewish, Perry Root, Eli Sagan, Harold Blacker and myself. Root's was the haberdashery store in town and George Sagan, Eli's father, owned a coat manufacturing company and was a distributor of coats to Sears and others. ... So, while other kids were going to Sunday school, we would go to the Conservative synagogue in Summit, which served perhaps sixty families, play softball, so, we could explain that we were going to church, too. My father was an agnostic when I was young. He died an atheist. My mother was not an educated Jew, couldn't read Hebrew or speak Hebrew, lit candles on Friday night, on *shabbos*, the night before the Sabbath, the Jewish Sabbath. We went to temple on the High Holy Days only. I would get dragged there, and so, I did not go to Hebrew school. I was *bar mitzvah*-ed at the YMHA camp. ... That was the Young Men's Hebrew Association, just like the YMCA. That was Cedar Lake [Camp], in Milford, Pennsylvania, and a camp run by a Jewish Federation of New Jersey, in the days of Felix Fuld and Louis Bamberger, you know, the founders of Bamberger's department stores, two very affluent, philanthropic people. I think my folks paid ninety dollars for the season. That's why I could afford to go to that camp, ... and the YMHA camp had Jewish content. Jewish content was services on Friday night and Saturday and no activities on Saturday morning until noon, but, otherwise, it was like any other camp and not unlike Christian camps, who also had Sunday services or Mass, you know, depending upon the denomination. So, I had a Texas rabbi as a counselor, who taught me Hebrew phonetically, and I was *bar mitzvah*-ed there, reciting blessings phonetically, and my mother and dad brought ... cake and ice cream for three hundred kids and that was my *bar mitzvah* party. That was really my first connection with Jews, I mean, with Jewish friends, and it had an enormous impact on me.

SH: Were you thirteen at this point?

AB: I was thirteen when I entered camp, and then, when I was sixteen, I was a counselor. Because of my maturity and ... my physique, I had fifteen-year-olds and sixteen-year-olds in my bunk and I was a counselor, a CIT, counselor-in-training, because, remember, this was during World War II and all of the seventeen-year-olds were drafted. So, I had an experience there both

as a CIT and a counselor. So, that was my first experience with other Jewish young people. Having told you what I told you about Summit, I can tell you I had a wonderful experience there, despite that. I was president of the student body at Summit High School. I was vice-president of the senior class. I was an All-State athlete, soccer, in my junior year and in my senior year. I played baseball, varsity baseball. I decided not to play basketball, which was my favorite sport, because ... I thought it'd get in the way of my studies, but I played on the Y Comets, the YMCA basketball team in Summit, where I used to work out, quite often, with friends, playing basketball. We would play other Ys and other community teams all around. So, one day, I got a call from the assistant principal. Mr. Woodward, whose daughter was a classmate of mine, and he said, "Allen, we are really disturbed by the fact that you're playing varsity ball at the YMCA. We need you here on the team at Summit High School and you've got to reconsider," but I didn't, because I really felt that it would get in the way. ... Also, as an athlete, I think, in soccer, I had absolute confidence in myself and in my ability, and, because of that, I was an excellent player. In basketball, I lacked the confidence I ought to have had. ... I was really an outstanding player, and I played basketball at Dartmouth College and I was an All-American in soccer at Dartmouth as well, I think the reason I didn't play at Summit [was], I didn't think I was good enough, [laughter] but who knows? So, I started to tell you that my experience [was good]. I had very good friends. ... You know, there are always gangs of kids that are together. I had many dates that I had, that I liked very, very much. So, on balance, as I look back on it, I had a wonderful school experience. With my fellow students and with my teachers, I never felt that I was abused because I was a Jew. I grew up ashamed of the fact that I was a Jew. I was ashamed. ... You know, when somebody would say, "What's your religion?" I wouldn't lie about it, but I just felt so self-conscious and it wasn't until I was seventeen years old and I had enlisted in the Navy, ... that I then began to have some experience outside, that I realized the problem, which my mother was right about, wasn't me, the problem were the bigots of the world, and that was going to be very difficult to change, but there's no question that who I am and what I am was, in great part, shaped by that experience, because I've spent a lifetime, both as a kid and to this day, working hard with people, with organizations, in trying to build respect and value for people different than yourself. ... We've done it in a number of different ways in New Jersey, for example, with the New Jersey Campus Diversity Initiative, in which we invited every college, university, in New Jersey to submit proposals for three-year grants dealing with diversity. We created an endowment at Dartmouth, in 1989-1990, for human and intergroup relations, to fight prejudice and bigotry. The reason we did it is that we realized, in 1968, that one in two Americans would be people of color and it was apparent that administrators and faculty in academia, at Dartmouth and in other colleges and universities, and in the corporate sector as well were oblivious. If colleges and universities continue to graduate students who have no experience in reading people different from themselves, imagine what we'd be faced with, and, even as a child, growing up, and all through college, I worked hard ... to get to know people and understand what it was that made them what they are, in terms of their ethnic, national background or whatever, and so, there's no question that I was shaped very much by that early experience.

SH: Did your sister suffer the same sort of prejudice as you did?

AB: Yes, I think so, yes.

SH: What about your father and the business there in Summit? It was very successful, obviously.

AB: Yes.

SH: However, did they ever sit around the dining room table and talk about any incidents?

AB: No. You know, if you think about it, everybody knew that the family was a Jewish family and that the family involved were Jewish, also, but the business was successful, and so, the answer to that is no. ... Somehow, when there's a buck to be made and economics are involved, whether you do business with a Jew or a Gentile doesn't seem to be important, right. [laughter] That's one of the great equalizers. So, the answer to that is no.

SH: I just wondered, coming from Long Island and having broken with the other brother, was there any time that they were in doubt that they had made a mistake?

AB: No. One of the interesting things about the supermarket business in Jersey is, ShopRite was founded by a group of men who were Jewish and Gentile, some Irish, mostly Italian, besides the Jews. That was ShopRite, and Pathmark was an offshoot of ShopRite, founded by Al Aidekman, Milt Perlmutter and Herb Brody. They were Jewish. Kings Super Market was a Jewish-founded firm, by my family. Kings was founded in 1936, ShopRite came into being, probably in the late '40s, Pathmark, a little while after that. ... The Jewish Historical Society [of MetroWest], which is the MetroWest Jewish Federation's historical society here, has organized a series of exhibits, and the first exhibit was called "Minding the Store" and "Minding the Store" told the story of the immigrants, the Jewish immigrants, who moved into the Weequahic Section of Newark, when they came from the other side, and had retail shops on Prince Street, and, also, told the story of Kings, ShopRite and Pathmark. That exhibit is still being exhibited. ... Between August the 25th, I think, and September the 17th, it's going to be at the Morristown Museum, if you're interested in seeing it. What I'd like to do is arrange for Linda Forgosh, who's the curator of the Historical Society, to take you through that personally, because I think it would be helpful and interesting.

SH: That would be wonderful. The Morris Museum actually hosted an exhibit that dealt with World War II in Morris County and we were fortunate, this program, to provide the soundtrack for that, and speak on a couple of the panels.

PC: I wanted to ask one question, just because I do not know; ShopRite and Pathmark are both New Jersey firms?

AB: ... Yes, but ShopRite operates in Pennsylvania, New York State, Connecticut.

PC: But, they both got their start here.

AB: Yes, and Pathmark, the same, they operate in New York, too. They got their start here, yes. A&P didn't open up their first supermarket here until 1941. So, Dad and his two brothers were really pioneers here. The first supermarket in New Jersey was opened by the Otis Family in

Elizabeth, New Jersey. It was called Big Bear. Those were the days in which, when the supermarkets opened up, one was called Giant Tiger, Big Bear, you know, animal names, for some reason. That was single stores. ... They were there for years, but just disappeared, yes.

SH: Going back to your family's Eastern European roots, what was the discussion that you heard around the table about world events in the mid to late 1930s, at about the same time you were moving from Long Island to Summit? Was the family discussing what was going on in Europe at that time, with Hitler coming to power and, in 1939, when he invaded Poland? Was that discussed at home?

AB: Yes, but, most of all, the new business and family involvement were discussed, and of the possible US entry into the war. But, because Dad was always at work, we seldom had these dinner conversations.

SH: Establishing a new business in a new area, in the midst of the Depression, what kind of nerve did that take?

AB: You know, my father was the driving force and, when I think about it, he really was fantastic, because let's assume that Ben was wrong and my mother was wrong, but the papers were correct, and they came away with forty thousand or sixty thousand apiece. That was hardly enough to do anything. Dad then needed financing and he saw Dean Travis, the president of Summit Trust Company, in 1936. This would have been the Summit Bank, you know, which grew to be a very large bank, and he wanted to borrow ten thousand dollars and Travis said, "Joe, we'd be happy to lend you," this is a true story, "ten thousand dollars, but we want you to keep ten thousand on deposit." So, Dad said, "Mr. Travis, here's the question I have: I want to borrow ten thousand dollars and I'll do whatever I want to do with it, including shooting crap." "Joe, I'm sorry, I can't help you." So, they were able to get help from suppliers. In those days, and for many years thereafter, dairy men, milk suppliers, would help finance supermarkets, in order to get the dairy business. Fat renderers, that used to pick up bones and skins and fat, would help finance supermarkets. You know, they wouldn't do the whole job, but they would help finance supermarkets, in order to get the right to pick up the fat, but that was quite common, and then, bank financing, yes.

SH: Do you know why your parents picked Summit as their location?

AB: Yes, I do. Dad spent a lot of time looking, and there was a realtor, by the name of Joe Ublacker, who was the realtor for Big Ben, and he and Dad were good friends and he began to act as an adviser to Dad and the conclusion that Dad reached is that he wanted stores along the Lackawanna Railroad, so that he would avoid the expenses of automobile traffic, for people from the office, and that was what his plan was. I also think that it was apparent to him that, even in those days of the Depression, the communities along the ... Lackawanna Railroad, Summit, Montclair, ... Short Hills, were the more affluent communities, and so, the first deal was in Morristown, New Jersey, around the Green. It used to be a movie theater, the Roth Theater. That was the first deal, but the deal fell through and that's when he wound up in Summit. The business with the railroad, that ... really didn't make a great deal of sense anyhow, but, as it

happened, all of the stores that were opened were all in North Jersey and all in more affluent communities, with the exception of one in Winfield Park, a new town primarily for war workers.

SH: I just thought that would have to have been so brave, to do something like that.

AB: Oh, yes, it really was, and I want to tell you that he worked and my mother worked. My mother was involved in every step along the way, and there's no question that my mother really influenced my father greatly in the decision-making process. By 1947, the business had begun to have some serious problems and one of the reasons it had them was that Dad was so motivated to show his brother, Ben, that he didn't need him and to open up more stores than he did, that he wanted stores, stores, stores, and so, he made decisions to open up stores with limited parking, Ivy Hill, New Jersey, [an area in Newark's West Ward], for example, when the Ivy Hill Apartments first went up, and he did that to get stores opened. Now, lots of locations were very, very good locations, but lots of them were not so good. By 1947, the business already had reached maturity and, suddenly, you've got ShopRite, and then, Pathmark shortly afterwards, with new, larger stores and it really became a very, very difficult game. In those years, then, there was ShopRite, Pathmark, Acme Supermarkets, Food Fair Supermarkets, Grand Union Supermarkets, A&P Supermarkets, Daitch Shopwell, from New York, very competitive. Dad had also reached a point where he felt that he was no longer capable of running the business. By the way, I think my dad, more than anyone that I ever met, knew not only what his strengths were, but what his limitations were, too. He had an offer from the Grand Union, in 1947, from Lansing Shield, who then was the CO of Grand Union, to buy Kings for a million-and-a-half. Now, that was a lot of dough and, at that time, my sister had been married in 1948. My wife and I were married in 1949. My sister, Phyllis, and her husband, Len Schecter, who was, three years older than I was, had come into the business a year earlier, I came into the business when I graduated in 1948. ... I got my MBA at Dartmouth's Tuck School ... after and we were both very cocky and we didn't want Dad to sell the business and my mother wanted the business for us, for her children, and she refused to let my dad sell the business. It would have been the right decision for us to make, and to have started from scratch, because we were still burdened with meat and produce concessions which made it difficult for us to compete effectively.

SH: Was your mother considered an equal partner with the other two brothers and your father?

AB: No, my mother, no. It was really my dad's interest and my uncles' interests, and that changed when my mother then received an interest from one of Dad's brothers, and then, my sister and I became minority stockholders. ... Dad was a guy who wanted his brothers to have exactly what he got out of the business, even though their responsibilities were quite different. ... Dave had left the business when he got married in 1949 and wanted to sell his interest to Dad. Dad said, "No, I want you in. Don't worry about it. Whatever we do, one-third is yours." It wasn't until a few years later that Dave decided that he was going to sell and, when he did that, he hired lawyers at that point. So, it turned out to be not the negotiation that you would expect under the circumstances, but the two remained friendly. Although he moved to California and they didn't see each other, they didn't have the kind of problems that the other brothers had with Ben. Moe, Dave and Joe and went to the grave not speaking to Ben, and, when Dad died, in 1973, mailing a letter in Bal Harbour, Florida, and dropped to the ground, the police looked in the phone book for Bildner. They found Ben Bildner in Florida and called him, he was Dad's

brother, but he couldn't identify the body. So, that was it. It was really a sad story. Moe stayed on and he stayed active until he died, although his activities were limited. ... Moe lived with us until the day he died, both at 129 Mountain Avenue and 54 Hawthorne Place, where I lived before I went in the service, and, in those days, you know, food was sold quite differently. Butter was not pre-wrapped, self-service, but brought in big tubs, and a customer would come to the service counter, "I want a pound of butter, please," or a half a pound, and then, you would cut it out, wrap it and give it, and eggs did not come in as they come in today. ... The eggs would come in egg crates, not in cartons, and then, they had to be candled. That meant that every egg had to be put under a light, to see whether there were blood spots or double yokes, because double yokes were worth more.

PC: That, I remember. [laughter]

AB: Yes, do you? Yes, and my Uncle Moe's responsibility, from the beginning, was only to candle eggs. That's what he did. ... usually in the basement of the Summit store, he would candle every single egg sold. That was his only responsibility, but he had one-third of the business, together with my dad, until illness forced him out. He was seriously ill and he decided that ... the right thing to do was to ... give up his interest, both to my mother and to my sister and myself, and, when he recovered from that, it was stomach cancer he had, he never returned to work. Moe, loved the ladies. He always had lady friends. He was very obese and a character, [laughter] and he lived with us all of his life.

SH: I thought there were just the four brothers, but there were three other siblings as well, on your father's side. You said there were seven.

AB: No, not in the business.

SH: No, not in the business, but there were seven.

AB: Yes, a sister, Ann, sister Rebecca, sister Lillian, brother Ben, Moe, Dave and...

PC: Seven.

AB: Seven, yes, oh, and sister Lillian, Dad's sister, married Harry Wasserman, my mother's brother. ... Harry had a liquor department in Kings Super Market in Plainfield, New Jersey. It was a concession, and that's how Harry made a living until he retired.

SH: Did your mother have siblings, other than the brother and sister-in-law who lived with you?

AB: Yes, Irving, Max, Sol, Ben, Betty. I think that's it. [laughter]

SH: Okay, thank you. To go back to the World War II era, what do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you?

AB: On December 7th, remember, Dave and Moe were living with us, and I was in the living room with my Uncle Dave. ... My father worked seven days and seven nights and I never saw

him. He never came to a game that I played in, to a varsity game, and it wasn't that he was not interested. I knew he was proud of what I was accomplishing. ... We never spent any time together. I never really knew what made him, what had shaped his life, and, by the way, I admired him very, very much. He was, really, a merchandising, advertising genius, but Dad was not a good manager, a terrible delegator. That was not his strength and he really had never learned what his older brother had learned, which was to surround himself with competent people who could make up for his own shortcomings, but Dave, he would take me out, ... take breakfast with us in Watchung Lake, in Summit, hike together. I remember, he bought me a BB gun, so [that] we could target shoot together. He was like my surrogate father and we were on the couch on December 7th, when we suddenly saw a television ...

SH: Television or on the radio?

AB: I guess, on the radio, the first television set I saw was in 1939. Our neighbor across the street had the first ten-inch set, where we saw *The Christmas Carol*.

SH: Did you really?

AB: With a good friend of mine, Dick Sprincoe, who, ... eventually, went to the Naval Academy, and then, when DuMont began to produce their first television sets, we had one in Summit. I guess it was after the war.

SH: Most likely. They were very rare.

AB: Yes, it was. So, it was on the radio that we heard it, yes.

SH: Were you listening to football?

AB: I think Dave must have been listening to classical music, and I might have been bothering him, as usual, yes.

SH: What was the discussion that happened that afternoon? How did the family react?

AB: Well, absolute shock, and, of course, concerned that everyone, now, who was eligible was going to wind up in the war, but I think, most of all, shock and surprise.

SH: You would have been sixteen, if my math is correct.

AB: 1941, no, fifteen, yes. Well, I knew, as soon as I realized what was going on, ... if I was going in I wanted to be an officer and I wanted to go to the Naval Academy.

SH: You would have been a sophomore at Summit High School at that point.

AB: Yes, right, and I took the competitive examinations for the Naval Academy in my junior year and ... you either needed the nomination of a Congressman or a Senator and Dad had arranged for me to meet with, I think he was a judge by the name of Hughes, to get his advice, ...

when I was, I guess, sixteen going on seventeen, and I didn't make the competition. So, in order to be nominated by a Congressman, ... they were not going to nominate people who were not at the top. ... Then, I did the same thing with the Coast Guard Academy, but ... I didn't make the competition there, either. So, I then decided that I would enlist in the Navy and apply for the naval officer training program, the V-12 program, and I did.

SH: You were aware of that program.

AB: Oh, yes. We were made aware of that by our counselors at school and who knew about it, and that's what I wanted to do. I also had a cousin who would be, I guess, ... about five years older than me who had graduated [from] the Naval Academy, Paul Shulman. He was my father's sister's son. She had married Herman Shulman. That's a story in itself, because, after he had finished his tour of duty in the Pacific, as a lieutenant in the Navy, he became the first commander of the Israeli Navy in the War of Independence, after the state was recognized by the United Nations. So, at any rate, I had been admitted to Yale and Harvard and rejected at Cornell. Yale was my first choice, because a cousin of mine, twelve years my elder, was a Yale graduate and he had taken my first cousin, Mark Shulman, and me, when we were thirteen, to a Yale-Harvard game. I had fallen in love with Yale. That was my choice for the V-12 program, because you had an opportunity to provide a choice, but the Navy sent me to Dartmouth College.

SH: It was the Navy that sent you to Dartmouth College.

AB: Yes. I was sworn in on July 1, '44, at Grand Central Station and, together with other apprentice seamen, went by bus to Hanover, New Hampshire. There were two thousand of us on the Dartmouth campus, two thousand apprentice seamen and Marines. We were in the Navy, subject to Navy rules, policies and regulations. We were under the command of an officer of captain rank, Captain Cummings, and a one-eyed Marine colonel. We paraded every Friday before the officers, and the Secretary of the Navy, occasionally, and others, visitors from Washington. We got up at six o'clock for calisthenics, at reveille time. There were three hundred civilians on campus at that time, also, who either were not eligible for some reason, physical ailments or whatever, and they were so upset with being awakened by reveille that, every night, at taps, which was nine o'clock, they would play Benny Goodman's *Swing, Swing, Swing*, blasting all over the campus. We had two years of naval training, seamanship, engineering and you name it, and two years of liberal arts education. We had physical training, including the obstacle course, every day, which was incredibly difficult. We had survival training. For example, the Spalding Pool at Dartmouth would be put ablaze, and then, ... you'd climb a cargo net, and then, jump, as though you were leaping from a ship, into the flaming water, so that you could learn to swim out of it without being burned. You know, it was serious stuff. ... Most of us were there anxious to finish our training and get out and ... fight those Nazis. We didn't realize how lucky we were, those of us who were discharged and never in combat, because the war was over in '46 and ... our two years was up. We were commissioned, but hadn't served. There were some that had returned from active duty. I was seventeen when I enlisted. There were some who returned from active duty, who were already out there, but they were boatswain's mates or apprentice seamen and had made V-12. They came in not to become officers, but to get the hell out of the war. So, we had a mixture of people. ... I was in a battalion. Our battalion commander was one of the crudest human beings I had ever met. He

was about six-foot-two or three, big and crude. I was seventeen, one day, when he says, "Bildner, we have liberty this weekend. How would you like to come with me to the carnival in White River Junction, Vermont?" So, I had no choice. I didn't know why he had asked me and, by the way, in those days, I was still more interested in baseball than girls. So, we get to White River and the carnival and we're walking down the midway and there are two women coming our way. "Bildner, yours doesn't look too good." [laughter] That was my experience with him, but, you know, all of the men who lived in, around Hanover, in New Hampshire, like all over the United States, were off to war, and so, many of their young women were single, or their wives were lonely. There was a dance hall in Claremont, New Hampshire. So, on liberty, we'd hitchhike, you know, about an hour, to get to the dance hall, or we would go to ... Smith, [Mount] Holyoke, Wellesley, the girls' schools, Colby College, nearby for our dates, but it was quite an experience. There were lots of amusing things that happened, too. For example, part of our training was to learn to row whale boats. Now, don't ask me why, but whale boats would accommodate about six on each side. It was a heavy boat with oars and the whale boats were lowered into the Connecticut River, off Ledyard Bridge, which is just outside of Hanover, and there would be chief boatswains in the stern of the boat and an officer of captain rank, our commander, barking orders, and the townspeople would be on the bridge, laughing. This was the United States Navy. [laughter]

SH: As you learned the ropes.

AB: Yes, but, you know, in addition to the academic training and the military training, Dartmouth, this would have been true in all of the officer training programs in the United States, still had athletic teams, football, basketball, soccer. I played basketball for Dartmouth, this was in 1946 and we're still in the Navy, and it was the ninth consecutive year that Dartmouth had won the Ivy League championship, and then, I had also played soccer, in the days in which only your girlfriend or your mother went to the soccer game. I had been All-State, as I told you, at Summit High School and I was center forward at Dartmouth and All-American there. All right, we had a fantastic coach. ... You know, interesting, to this day, I learned only when we were at Dartmouth, at our grandchild's, Lizzie's, graduation, last week, that there's a plaque on the wall of the new clubhouse at the new soccer field called "the Golden Boot," and I'm seventh on the list of highest scorers in eighty years at Dartmouth and I'm tied with four [others] for the most goals scored in a game, five in two games. [laughter] ... I never knew it and, today, here I am, stumbling around with my cane.

SH: That is fantastic.

AB: Yes. When I came into the business, my dad thought that all of his problems would be over, because I had my undergraduate degree, I had my MBA, I had the education he never had, and I believed that he was a cockeyed genius in merchandising and advertising. Within one week of the time we were in business, ... he and I both knew we had big problems, but the incredible thing about Dad was what I told you, is that no one knew not only his strengths better, but his limitations better. ... In 1958, he had a serious coronary and, after recovering, he came in one day and he said, "Son, I know what you want me to be, I know what the doctor wants me to be, I know what your mother wants me to be, a chairman, an adviser, a counselor. You and I both know I can't be that kind of person. Whatever I'm in, I have to run with my own hands. So,

the best thing for me to do is to get out and let you run the business." My brother-in-law was in the business at that time, too, and he [my father] walked out, never stepped in the door again, and he and Mom still had the financial interest and voting control of the business. ... I thought I'd been ready to take over the business when I first came in, which I learned, a little while later, was not exactly so, and, after he left, I really felt very, very badly. I hadn't pushed him out. But, I wanted to keep him involved, because there was a great deal that he could contribute, so, I began to send him the first month's operating report and cash flow. Dad had a very heavy handwriting. He used a black pencil, black Listo pencil, and he used to send notes and articles, you know, in this black handwriting. I got back the operating report and cash flow a few days after I sent it to him with this caption, "Dear Son, this conceals more than it reveals. Don't send any more," [laughter] and he never stepped foot in the business again. We wondered how he was spending his time, because that would have been the late '50s and he died in '73. Well, one way we knew he was spending time was with his grandsons, his grandchildren, making up for the time that he and I and he and my sister had never spent together, but he was also working with the cardiac patients in the veterans' hospital in East Orange, helping them, helping their families, in many ways that no one knew about. The mayor of East Orange told me, one day, when I met him, "Were you ever aware of what your father did for me and my family?" I said, "I knew that you and Dad were friends and that you had worked together at the veterans' hospital." "Your dad took care of me and my family," I'll be in tears soon, "through every crisis we ever had. I couldn't begin to tell you what he did for me and my family," and that was quite true. He was also a coin collector and a stamp collector and he believed in the educational value of collecting stamps and coins. So, he used to teach that to kids in schools, because he thought that was important, to help children learn collecting stamps and coins. So, he spent a great deal of time at that. I don't think I told you that I met my wife when she was fifteen.

SH: No, you did not tell us that part.

AB: No, okay. [laughter] ... A friend of mine at Dartmouth, a classmate, invited another classmate of mine and me to go to the beach in Deal, New Jersey. Joan's folks used to rent a home there in the summer. Her maiden name was Lebson and we had never met until that day. My folks, my dad and my Uncle Moe, were partners in a home in Sea Bright, which is the first town as you go over the bridge to Sandy Hook, and so, I invited Bob, Bob Kirsch, who I had met when we enlisted on July 1st of '44, to stay at my house, our house, and then, to go to the beach the next day. We get there the next day and Ben, the friend who invited us, said, "Get into your bathing suits. There's a volleyball game going on." So, we got into our suits, came out. I look across the net. There's Joan Lebson, fifteen years old, two-piece bathing suit. I say to ... Bob, "Bob, there's the girl I'm going to marry." My folks and I gave her a sixteenth birthday party at our home in Summit. I had to wait for her to graduate the Dwight School, now Dwight-Englewood, in Englewood, New Jersey, to get married. ... In 2009, we'll be married sixty years. This is our fifty-ninth anniversary.

SH: Congratulations.

AB: Yes, but, mainly, the reason for our long-term relationship is, ... each year, we exercise an option to renew or not to renew, [laughter] and there have been some years when it wasn't quite as clear as it is in other years, but it's been great. ... I was dating someone else, who I thought I

was in love with, when I met Joan. She never came to my graduation, at my undergrad graduation, but did come to my Tuck School, ... for my MBA. So, I did have a chance to be with her there.

SH: Show her off at campus.

AB: Yes. [laughter]

SH: As a young man, growing up in Summit, did you work in the family business?

AB: Oh, yes.

SH: Were you required to be at the store as soon as practice was over?

AB: Well, there, I worked. I worked for two reasons. One, I enjoyed it. ... That was the only time, if you think about it, that I had a chance to be where my father was. So, I loved it and it was also expected of me. So, I worked after school, I worked ... on Saturdays and, when my wife was eight years old, her parents belonged to Englewood Country Club, in Englewood, New Jersey, and she was taking golf lessons. When I was eight years old, I was putting groceries on the shelves of my daddy's supermarket. So, I worked in the stores all through school and, you know, for allowance money, too.

SH: You got paid.

AB: Yes.

SH: I was going to ask if you had discretionary funds.

AB: [laughter] Yes, not much, but, yes, I had an allowance.

SH: Was the same thing expected of your sister?

AB: No. You know, I don't recall Phyllis, ever, as we're growing up, working in the stores. Later on, after her marriage, she wrote a column, you know, which appeared in our advertising. Her middle name is Clare, Phyllis Clare, and that was the name she wrote under.

SH: Were you only working in the store in Summit or would you be farmed out to work in other stores?

AB: No, when I was growing up in Summit, it was only Summit that I was working for.

SH: What did you do in the summertime? You talked about the family home on the shore.

AB: Oh, yes. In the summertime, you're quite right, when I was home on vacation, now, because I went back as a civilian; you know, I didn't tell you, I couldn't get back in at Dartmouth. I fell in love with the school and I had already established myself there in a number of different

ways, but ... I couldn't get back in, because they had to save space for the students that had been admitted and off to war, or had matriculated and were coming back. So, I posted my three-hundred-dollar bond at Harvard, because, in those days, if you were an undergraduate at Harvard and graduated, you were more apt to get into the Business School. ... I knew I definitely wanted my business degree. So, I had my bond posted and was going to Harvard. Two good friends from Summit, Al Nevins and Earl Ingminson, and I decided that we would take a couple of days together, like we were reunited, after the war, and drive to Montreal together. These were guys that I was very close to and I said, "Look, I'd like you to stop in Hanover, it's a little out of the way, to see how beautiful that campus is," and, while I was there, and it was only when I got there that I said, "You know, I'm going to go in and see Lloyd K. "Pudge" Neidlinger, the dean of the college," and I went in to see the dean, he was able to see me, and told him that ... my bond was posted at Harvard, "But, is there any possibility that I can come here?" Well, the same thing that happened to me, it happened to others at the other hundred universities; students who wound up in colleges different than their choice went. So, on that day, I was admitted to Dartmouth and admitted to the Tuck School. It's amazing, you know, what timing is. So, the result of that was that I was able to get my undergraduate degree and my graduate degree in four years because of the V-12 program, instead of six, and the GI Bill paid for my college education. But, you know, the thing that I always regretted is that, because I missed two years of liberal arts education, I did have two years of liberal arts, but it fell far short of what I would have been interested in, language, history, philosophy and others. ... Now, after I got my commission and was discharged at Lido Beach in June of '46, I was in the Naval Reserve. I suddenly get a draft notice, "A-1, report." This is the Korean War now. I write the admiral of the Third Naval District. ...

SH: This is 1950, four years goes by.

AB: Yes. I'm ordered [to report]. I get a draft notice. I write a letter to the admiral of the Third Naval District. I get a letter back, "Dear Ensign Bildner, it is true, you served and had an honorable discharge from the United States Navy, having served from July 1, '44, to June of '46, but, since you never served outside of your training, you're eligible for the draft." Now, I could have enlisted again in the Navy and gone in with my commission, but we had just had our first child; I was reclassified 3-A and escaped the war.

SH: At this point, now, you were finished with your MBA and you were here in New Jersey.

AB: Yes. ... When Joan and I were married, in 1949, we rented an apartment on South Harrison Street in East Orange, New Jersey, and that was really the bedroom community for young marrieds, just starting out. It was also the first community that B. Altman/Oppenheim Collins/Franklin Simon Department Stores began to open up in the suburbs. It was a white, young, middle-class community, with two movie theaters. Of course, it changed dramatically through the years, and that was where we first lived. We had lots of friends and Joan always felt very self-conscious, because she had never gone to college and all of our friends, their wives, were all college graduates, and I would say to Joan, "Joan, the mark of an educated person is not one who has a piece of paper in their hands, it's what you do with your life. You don't have to take a backseat to anybody. So, I just hope you'll think about that and change that." Well, she went to Upsala and she started at Upsala College, you know, the Lutheran college in East

Orange, New Jersey. ... I was in our office one day, which was on South Harrison Street, on the second floor, and a couple of times in late spring, nice weather, we had an old jalopy convertible, we bought for about 150 bucks, I'd see it go by with six of her male classmates in the car. ... After the second or third time, I said, "Joan, what are you doing with all those guys?" you know, I just happened to be there, on this day or that day. ... "These are just classmates of mine. I'm dropping them off on the way home." I said, "Joan, my memory is not so sharp that I don't remember when I was in school or college and we had a married woman in our presence, we always assumed she was sexually deprived." So, Joan said, ... "You're awful." But, a little while later, she was pregnant with our child and that was the end of the jalopy, and then, for Joan to have felt the way that she did all those years, she winds up, a very, very active person, played a leadership role in many different organizations, and has been my partner in every possible way and made a great contribution to our business as well and served on the Rutgers Board of Trustees, as you know, for twelve years. Then, we both received honorary degrees at Bloomfield College, thanks to Jack Noonan, [former president of the college], and, when Jack called me to get information about Joan and a bio about Joan and I told him about how we were married when she was eighteen; so she didn't go on to college ...

SH: You met at fifteen.

AB: [laughter] Yes, thank you, right. He said, "Do you know, I'm going to make a recommendation to the honorary degree committee and the trustees, that they also give her our AB degree." So, Joan stands up to get hooded and Noonan then tells the class about how we met when she was fifteen, we were married when she's eighteen, she never went to college and they're awarding her not only her honorary degree, but her AB degree, and, with that, she got a standing ovation.

SH: Good for her.

AB: So, the woman who was so self-conscious now has honorary degrees from Rutgers, from Rowan and from Bloomfield. [laughter]

SH: How many other children do you have?

AB: Rob and Jim. ... Rob, is fifty-six, and Jim is fifty-three. Rob has four children, from ... fifteen to twenty-three. ... Jim and Nancy have two, or had two. Lizzie just graduated Dartmouth. Peter died of an overdose at twenty-one. He was at Northeastern University, bright, a bright, sweet child. ... when that happened to Jim and Nancy and us, [there were] a number of people who suddenly said to us, "We had the same experience," what's happened with ... drugs in our country, prescription drugs and serious drugs. It's just terrible. So, we had six grandchildren. We have five now. Rob's family, they're the Yalies. Rob and Lisa both graduated Yale. Their oldest, Elaine, graduated Yale three years ago. The next oldest, Ari, will be a senior next year. The next oldest, is a junior there, so, they're the Yalie family.

SH: You still get to go to Yale then, no problem.

AB: Yes.

SH: Where were you housed when you went back to Dartmouth after the war? Were you housed on campus?

AB: Oh, yes.

SH: There was room there for you.

AB: Well, I was a member of a senior honor society called Casque and Gauntlet. Casque and Gauntlet, was one of three senior honor societies then, Dragon, Sphinx and Casque and Gauntlet. Casque and Gauntlet was the only senior honor society, like the fraternities, where people could live, and it could accommodate sixteen of us, and so, I lived there for two years, both my '47 year, when I was still an undergraduate, and then, my graduate year, too, at the Tuck School. It was a senior honor society that was made up of the athletes, scholars, campus leaders. It was a great group and experience for me and at Dartmouth, I had a wonderful experience. After the war, fraternities opened up again and every fraternity had discriminatory clauses. I was bid to all fraternities, except SAE, [Sigma Alpha Epsilon]. SAE was the most rigid about their discriminatory clauses. But, the openness of fraternities was, because people returning from service, were infused with brotherhood, and about making the world a different place. We had blacks among us, Asians among us, not in the numbers that exist today, but those were different times. I decided that I wanted to identify, as a Jew, because I had not yet dated a Jewish girl at that time. This would have been 1947. I had reached a point, sometime ago, as I told you, when I realized the problem with anti-semitism was not mine, there was no reason to be ashamed of my religion, but that of the bigots. ... So, I joined Pi Lambda, which was a non-sectarian fraternity with a few non-Jews in it, but still essentially a Jewish fraternity. ... It was after that that I was elected president of the senior class. ... I was vice-president of my Tuck School class. I was an All-American athlete in soccer and played varsity basketball, as I told you. I had served as chairman of the committee of class presidents, and asked by John Sloan Dickey, who then had succeeded [Ernest] Martin Hopkins as the president, to chair a committee to recommend a new student government for Dartmouth and ... recommend changes on alcohol use in the fraternities. So, my Dartmouth experience was just a wonderful, wonderful experience.

PC: When you said that fraternities had "discriminatory policies," were they quotas or were they just ...

AB: Oh, no.

PC: No, they were just exclusions.

AB: Oh, yes, exclusions. They were white, Caucasian and Christian. That meant no Italian Catholics, no blacks, no Hispanics and no Jews. ... I guess I was the second Jew in Casque and Gauntlet Society in the history of the college, but ... the only experiences that I had where there was anti-Semitism was some of what Dartmouth was prewar, which continued even after the war, but it was limited. Now, maybe it was limited because it became less fashionable to be bigots publicly, during those days, but I remember three incidences. We were playing Columbia University in New York, in their arena, during the year that we were winning our ninth

consecutive basketball championship, and Columbia had the first African-American in the Ivy League, Norm Skinner. He was high scorer in the Ivy League, All-Ivy. We never met him, but knew him only by reputation. Well, it was always the custom for Ossie Cowles, our coach, to call us together, in a huddle, to motivate us. He said, as we were preparing to start the game, in a huddle, "I'm going to tell you something different than I ordinarily do, and this is it: I want you to go in and get that nigger today." This is after the war. We can't believe it. We're looking for truth, idealism, right. We couldn't believe it. Another experience like that was, ... the second year in which I was a member of C&G, Todd Duncan's son, Charlie Duncan, was at Dartmouth. Todd Duncan was the musical comedy star and opera star of *Porgy and Bess*, fantastic voice and actor. Charlie Duncan, his son, was captain of the ski team, captain of the tennis team and a fantastic young guy, and we wanted to bid him to our chapter. Chapter policies were, "One blackball and no one gets a bid," and we had a guy, Charlie Matola, from Virginia, who wanted no part of a black. Well, after a great deal of discussion with Charlie, we really helped educate him, and so, when he made the decision to be with us, it wasn't because we threatened him or persuaded him against his will, he really began to understand where the world was, but the final bidding was not to be for a week or so. We, Casque and Gauntlet was modeled on the Arthurian Legend. Our president was King Arthur, our secretary was Merlin, I was Sir Mordred, the Black Knight, there were other knights, and, now, it's co-ed, ladies and knights. We got a call from the president of Chase National Bank, one of the leading banks, a Rockefeller bank. Nelson Rockefeller was a Dartmouth graduate and a C&G, the chairman of Chase was a Dartmouth graduate and a C&G. You may want to take this name out of the tape.

SH: I will let you do that.

AB: Okay. We get a call. Our president Bob McLawrey gets a call from him. He'd like to attend the next chapter meeting. We had people in our chapter twenty-eight years old, twenty-six years old, people who'd returned from the war to finish their education, and they were all excited, because they thought that the CEO and chairman of the bank was coming to recruit them. So, after the chapter meeting is over, Bob McLawrey, our president, says, "We'll now turn the meeting over to you, Mr. so and so. What's on your mind?" "It's very simple. I understand that you're involved in the bidding process and that you're considering bidding Charlie Duncan. I have to tell you this: you know that I've always invited C&Gs to come to my home, to join my family and me wherever we are, but, if you persist in bidding him in, I can tell you, I will never feel that way again." I think he used the 'N' word.

PC: Wow.

AB: ... Can you imagine this?

PC: No, I really cannot, actually.

AB: By the way, he was the same guy who, with William F. Bill Buckley Jr., supported *The Dartmouth Review*, remember, when James O. Jim Freedman, the President of Dartmouth, had that problem. But, again, we were in an absolute state of shock.

[TAPE PAUSED]

PC: It is interesting. A lot of the people I have interviewed, from my era of college and yours, have those story about fraternity policies, because they always came up, because you had that blackball system. So, one or two people, or somebody from the outside, who was, in effect, an important alum, could really set the tone and there would be these very traumatic moments.

AB: Yes.

PC: I grew up in the South and they usually involved blacks, not Jews. I am not Jewish, but I was in a largely Jewish fraternity and we had very similar situation with an outside person and one chapter member from Alabama when we first pledged somebody who was black. It is a story, after that happened, I talked to other people, actually one generation earlier, who heard the same sort of stories. It is not unusual.

AB: I had been asked ...

PC: But, still shocking.

AB: Yes, it is.

PC: That somebody would care enough to do that at this point in time, after World War II.

AB: I know. When I was at Dartmouth, when I returned as a civilian in '47, *PM*, an investigative newspaper in New York, either *PM Magazine* or *PM*, I think it was *PM Newspaper*, it was a new paper, investigative reporting was its specialty, and they began to investigate the geographic quotas, starting with the Ivy League. There were geographic quotas, but they were not geographic. They were designed to keep out Jews, in particular, in those days, because there were not blacks applying. So, I had gotten a call from, John Sloan Dickey, our president, who I knew well, because of the work that he had asked me to do in areas of his interest that I mentioned to you. Would I be willing to meet with Max Lerner, the investigative reporter that's coming up for *PM*, to tell him about Dartmouth and to deal with any questions he has about Dartmouth? Now, he didn't tell me why Lerner was there and I didn't know why Lerner was there, until later, because I didn't know about *PM Magazine*, and I often wondered, "Did John Sloan Dickey set me up, or did he do it because I was the class president and he knew that I would report things as they were?" and I believe, knowing him as I did, that that's what my vote would be. ... During the war years, this would be from '44 through '46, when I was there, Bob Strong then was the director of admissions and he replied to letters and calls that he got from alumni complaining that there were, "Too many kikes," right? "It's about time you stopped the flow," and he replied to them, in writing, in that way, "We're trying to stop the flow." I had been asked by the class to be the class speaker at the trustees' luncheon at our fiftieth reunion. So, I decided that, after I had read other class addresses of the fiftieth reunion, about the football captain and about this athlete and ... about Winter Carnival, I wanted to talk about what life was there, both for the civilians who had started, and then, come back and those of us who were there. So, I spent a great deal of time in the Dartmouth Archives about those years, and, I mean, the material in there that demonstrates what the society was and what was common in universities, in discrimination, incredible stuff. One of my classmates, tells the story, and ... I

never knew this until it was our fiftieth reunion. We just came back from our sixtieth, so, that was a few years ago. His name was Joe Eisaman and he went in to see Pudge Neidlinger, our dean. The dean's office was open and he was sitting outside, suddenly, the student the Dean was seeing came out and he hears the Dean say to his secretary, "Send the little Jew in now." [laughter] But, things are getting better in our society, I think. We still have a long way to go and, if we think about the conflicts in the world, ... the conflicts, the human intergroup conflicts, caused by religion, ethnic, national, cultural differences, it raises the question, "What hope is there?" and, yet, I still believe that the important thing is that each of us do our own thing in those terms and try to make things better.

SH: When you were playing at Dartmouth as an All-American, since both Professor Clemens and I are from Rutgers, what did you hear of Rutgers? You were from New Jersey, so, you at least would know the name.

AB: Yes. [laughter] ... Of course I knew that Rutgers University was the State University, but I had very little knowledge of it. ... I hadn't read anything, or tried to read anything, about Rutgers ... or what was going on there, and I guess it was after the war that it seemed to me that Rutgers had made tremendous strides, under, ... the president who had been at Bennington College.

SH: [Edward J.] Bloustein.

AB: Bloustein, yes, especially academically, and I began then, Joan and I both began, to learn about what a fantastic university Rutgers was.

SH: I just wondered, competing as an athlete, were you ever in competition with Rutgers?

AB: ... No.

SH: Rutgers is not an Ivy League school, but they have competed with Ivy league schools.

AB: Oh, yes. ... We competed with Holy Cross and many other colleges besides Ivy League schools, but Rutgers was not among them.

PC: My memory, historically, because I was born about the time you are talking about, 1947, is that Rutgers played Ivy League schools, but they tended to be the ones in geographical proximity, because transportation, back then, was very expensive. You cannot go up to Dartmouth and play a game.

AB: Yes. That's true. By the way, that basketball coach that I was telling you about, talking about expensive, if we had arranged, with family or friends, to get a ride back to wherever he was, he would always collect our train tickets and bus tickets for himself. [laughter] He was a character.

SH: How did the war impact your father's business? You would still have been in school and probably still working at the store when rationing went into effect. How did that impact the store, or the business? There was more than one store at that point.

AB: Yes. ... There was rationing, of course, and so, your sales were limited by the extent to which goods were available to you, but the reality was, if you had merchandise, you did business, and it was profitable business that you did. So, I would say that, in terms of how we're affected, it was a positive effect, because everybody was competing on the same basis. The one thing that Dad did that probably hurt was, ... a black market was prevalent.

SH: Was it?

AB: Yes, especially in meat. Particularly in meat, sometimes in sugar, and the large chains, Food Fair, in particular, Grand Union, the other companies, were in the black market to get merchandise. My dad refused to do anything that was not aboveboard, in terms of how he got merchandise, how he got the goods that were rationed to him, and, because of that, we probably did not compete as effectively, in terms of the meat sales, as we otherwise might have.

SH: When you were at the Tuck School, or was it when you were an undergraduate that you wrote a thesis that dealt with supermarkets?

AB: Yes. You're wonderful, Sandra. No, really, you're asking some of the questions ... that lay it out. The first thesis I did, this would have been in ... the first year at the Tuck School, which was my senior year, undergraduate, as it happened, was on the history of the supermarket business, because the supermarket business had only began in 1930. So, by 1947, it was only seventeen years old and, you know, as I did this, there was very little written about the supermarket biz.

SH: What would be the definition of "supermarket" then, in 1947?

AB: It would have been a store, by the then standards, a large store, and, in those days, a large store might have been five thousand feet, ten thousand feet, in which the goods are sold self-service, self-service. ... When Mike Cullen founded the King Kullen [chain], he had been with the Kroger Company and he tried to persuade the Kroger Company, which was a large chain, like A&P, that had service stores, to introduce self-service and to call them supermarkets. Now, I don't know whether he coined the phrase or it became so later. So, ... he left Kroger and the first supermarket was the supermarket that he founded. Now, in the early days, the supermarkets that first started out, many of them, would put up carpenter horses, you know, and boards, and goods would be served in that way, rather [than] on metal gondolas, but the definition was, "A store that sold groceries, meats and produce and dairy products, self-service." Now, it wasn't all self-service, because dairy departments were serviced, with butter, for example, and cutting cheese. Meat departments were all-service. It wasn't until, I think, probably, 1949, 1950, when we Kings Super Market, had the first self-service meat department ever, in East Orange, New Jersey. So, it was quite different. So, the thesis was about the supermarket business and the only resources I had were *Supermarket Merchandising*, which was a magazine owned by someone who helped found the first trade association, Super Market Institute, and ... the head of research

for the Stop and Shop Company in Boston, Massachusetts. They were probably the only supermarket company in the United States that had a research department, that did market research and location research, and I met with, Bill Applebaum, their head of research and learned a great deal from him, and I did the thesis. Now, ... my professor ... was Harry Wellman, the professor of advertising at the Tuck School, who had been with Macy's and other companies before he returned to Dartmouth as a professor, and I asked him what my grade was. He said, "Well, take your thesis to the shores of the Connecticut River," which was nearby, "throw it out. If it gets to the other side, you get an 'A,' if it gets to the middle, you get a 'B,'" [laughter] but I got an "A" on it. Then, my next thesis was on ... creating a personnel department. In those days, it was not called human resource department, it was called personnel, and most supermarket companies in the United States, chains had employment officers, that would hire people, but they did not have personnel departments that had the responsibilities that human resource departments now have. So, this was a plan for Kings Super Market to create its first personnel department. So, both my master's and my senior thesis had to do with the supermarket business, and, by the way, I still have copies of them, if you want it. [laughter]

SH: Luckily, you did not throw them all into the river.

AB: No.

SH: When you were doing your research, did you go interview the people or were you just using what resources were printed? Did you do any kind of first-person interviews? You grew up in the industry, so, did you ever quote your father in your thesis?

AB: Yes. Oh, sure, ... I reached out to whomever was available to me, both through myself or Dad or my professors. ... The professor of industrial relations was Herman Feldman and he helped me with my master's thesis on creating a personnel department. By the way, ... I learned about collective bargaining at Dartmouth College. The hard way.

SH: How?

AB: Well, ...

SH: As a course?

AB: No, as I said "the hard way." ... If you were in the retail business, or, for that matter, any business, and you were doing business in urban areas in the United States, you were going to be organized. You're going to have labor unions. Remember, it was in ... FDR's first term that the National Labor Relations Board was established. So, our company in 1936 had no union and ... Dad helped the employees organize an independent union of Kings employees, in hopes he could prevent organized labor from gaining a foothold ... Dad and some of his associates would meet with them, to discuss any grievances they had or any needs they had. But dad was stunned to learn that those he thought were loyal had brought the union in. Well, when unions took over in New Jersey, they were all in the control of racketeers. ... Gangster #1, I think, was Frank Costello, Chicago; Gangster #2 was Longy Zwillman, Abner Zwillman, Newark, New Jersey, and among ... all of their enterprises, organized labor was very profitable thanks to threats and

bribery. Organized labor in New Jersey was corrupt at that time, that made the unions very difficult to deal with. The positive thing was, they always wanted to keep you in business, because it was good business for them. ... At least the unions that we had, Local 464, the meat cutters, Local 1245, retired clerks, and Local 863, the Teamsters. Our employees never suffered as a result of the fact that we had unions, because we were the whipping boy for the larger chains. So, they would use us, too, because we didn't have the economic muscle to say, "No," to take a strike, but those were terrible days, and, yet, we survived. When, the unions were thrown into trusteeship by the international and all the corrupt leaders, were out. I get a call from one of the delegates, of Local 1245, and he says, "Allen, you know that we want to keep you in business. The new head of this union is going to be Dick Johnson. His aspiration is to be the CEO of the International AFL-CIO. He doesn't care about your company and, if he can use your company as a means of becoming the top guy at the top, he'll do that. ... What I'd be willing to do is give you three more years on your contract for fifteen thousand dollars." I think to myself, "I'm finally going to be able to exercise what I learned about collective bargaining at the Tuck School." So, I said, "Pat, thank you very much, really appreciate the opportunity, but no thank you." So, I didn't do that; I didn't consider that.

SH: Bribery was not on the list.

AB: I didn't do that and the new guy comes in, Dick Johnson. We hired a labor relations counsel to represent us and we were raped. I mean, we were raped. We were raped because we couldn't afford a strike and he used us as the whipping boy to get more from the Acme and the Food Fair that he also had contracts with, and Pat was right when he forewarned us. Johnson was ... such a terrible leader that his own membership voted him out and a fellow by the name of Frank DeVito took over and we had an incredible relationship with Local 1245 and DeVito. He was so impressed with what we were doing, in our training and orientation, and our using a firm of behavioral scientists and psychologists to assist us, he hired the same firm to train the shop stewards. ... We never would usurp the responsibilities or authority that our unions had, nor did we expect them to usurp ours. Well, we never had a strike, we never had a lockout, and we're always able to come to an understanding. Many firms and many leaders made the mistake of acting as though the unions were always their enemy, and that's how they wound up getting treated. ... By the way, I don't know whether you followed the remarks of Andy Stern, the head of the Service Employees [International] Union. The service employee unions are those that have janitors, hotel employees, hospital employees. Andy Stern was in my son's class at West Orange High School, the son of an affluent family. His father was the managing partner of Hanoach, Besser and Stern, one of the leading law firms in New Jersey at the time. He winds up in the union movement from the moment he graduated ... Penn University, and is one of the leaders in the union movement ... nationally. He may wind up as the Secretary of Labor in the Obama Administration, which would be fantastic, but, ... if you read any of his speeches or listen to him when he is speaking, he talks about what the union movement meant to our economy and to jobs in the United States. You know that, today, the number maybe less than fifteen percent of labor in the United States that are organized. Is it fifteen or less?

PC: It is somewhere around there, yes. It is really low.

AB: Yes, low.

SH: I know it is under twenty percent. [Editor's Note: According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of employed persons represented by a union was 13.3 percent in 2007.]

AB: At one time, in areas like New York and New Jersey, it might have been forty to fifty percent of labor that was organized. They made certain that health benefits were more adequate, retirement benefits were adequate, wages were adequate, the minimum wage was satisfactory. Employers were really weak in the negotiating process. Now, unfortunately, one of the sad things about those days in which the unions were in the control of the gangsters, and even afterwards, when the leadership was legitimate, most pension funds defined pension benefits under the law, were overfunded. You know, for years, the investment returns were overfunded. So, first, A&P then other companies began to use the overfunding for corporate purposes, and then, in New Jersey, Governor Christie Whitman invented it, Governor James McGreevy followed suit, and, so many of our financial problems in New Jersey are the result of ... all of the reserved funds, transportation, pension funds, that were overfunded and used and, now, have created underfunding. So, that really reduced employee pension benefits, I hope, that the National Labor Relations Board will change, ... if we have a Democratic President, and I hope that the unions are able to organize more effectively.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We are back.

AB: Okay. I started to tell you that there were really two different Kings. There were many things that both Kings, 1936 through 1968, and Kings 1968 through 1988 had in common, but, in many respects, there were differences. The Kings, until, say, during Dad's leadership, which was right through 1958, was a Kings that was a mass marketer, that was targeting the mass market or the middle market, competing with A&P and everyone else on price, and the Kings ... slogan was, "Kings Super Market, where Mr. Joe saves you dough." ... "Mister Joe" was my father and people called him "Mister Joe" and the cartoon character, in the ads, was a jolly, chubby grocer in a white apron, I mentioned that I thought Dad's genius was in advertising and merchandising, and Dad believed that advertising had to have the impact of news. So, for example, our store in East Orange was burglarized. Burglars got in through the roof and burglarized the store. The following week, there was a full-page ad in the *Newark Evening News*. Then, there were two papers, *Newark Evening News*, *Newark Star-Ledger*, in both papers, one was a morning paper, one an afternoon paper, "Mister Joe has a job for the enterprising people who broke into our store in East Orange. Anyone that's bright enough to have done what these people did, we've got a job for." [laughter] The Acme Supermarket burned on Broadway in Newark. The following week, there's an ad in the paper, "Mr. Joe is not responsible for the fire that burned the Acme to the ground. Mr. Joe feels very badly about it and he invites all Acme customers to come to Kings, where he'll try to take care of them, with an understanding that, when the Acme's ready to go, they'll be free to return there." We have our first child. There's an ad in the paper, "Mr. Joe wants to announce the birth of his first grandchild, Rob, ten pounds, two ounces, a very happy event." Joan gets a call from her father, who was a very conservative guy, a lawyer, youngest judge in the history of the Bergen County Criminal Court, judge at twenty-three years old, "Joan, ... have you married into a family of barbarians? Is our personal life to be on the front pages of

the newspaper, advertising supermarkets?" My sister gets married. There's a full-page ad in the paper, "Mr. Joe wants to announce the marriage of his daughter to Leonard Schechter, who is now in our business, asks you to please spend an extra dime this week, because the wedding was very expensive." When Renault and Fiat first began to make small compact cars, ... my dad arranged for a car to be displayed in our Orange store, and the ad ran, "Buy a Renault car, available in the United States for the first time, cheaper than hamburger at a dollar a pound," okay. [laughter] ... We were targeting, competing on the basis of price, but, remember, I mentioned that Kings, then, was a mature company. The stores were smaller, parking was not as adequate as the new companies that had opened up, and things had changed. So, some time in the '60s, as I looked around, I said, "You know, we have far more talent in this organization than I think we're showing and I think it's about time we took a fresh look at everything that we're doing." So, we began market research in every store, in which we surveyed customers that, of our competition, to get at our strengths and weaknesses. We did. We called them "associates," not "employees," associate surveys, also, to see how we're doing with our own people. We took a fresh look at our advertising and, as we looked at our marketing research and the demographics research that we did, we realized that we were in affluent communities and the two characteristics different than those of our competitors' customers were education and income, and here we were, catering to everyone as though they were all monolithic, you know, a middle market. We also recognized that one in two women were working women, whether they were full-time or part-time and regardless of their income, working women then needed foods that were ready to serve, ready to eat and ready to cook, convenience foods. So, we completely re-did everything that we were doing in terms of advertising and merchandising. ... Our ads began to be, "Kings Super Market, with love from Kings." We had a picture of a different associate in our company every week, identifying who he was and where he was, in addition to the price advertising that still continued, but the pictures took up most of the space. Our emphasis was on perishables and our variety and quality exceeded anything of our competition at that time. We were all alone, from, ... I'd go back now to 1978, which was the first pilot that we opened up in Short Hills, in a larger store than the original Short Hills store, when we had, for the first time, salad bars in the stores. We're cutting and making fresh pasta. We were baking croissants and muffins. We had seafood open on the ice for the first time. Up until that time, most people didn't buy seafood in supermarkets, because it's all wrapped and most of it not good quality sold. We squeezed fresh orange juice. We were really unique in the things we're doing and we had competition and visitors in the supermarket business, whom we knew, from all over come visit us, and we really changed the face of food retailing in our country, in our state, and so, suddenly, ShopRite, Foodtown, others, began to do what we were doing, because ... we were alone, and, for a couple of years, we were all by ourselves in providing merchandise and quality to people who wanted that kind of service and didn't have it. So, there were really two different kinds of Kings. We had retained a firm called Human Resources Institute, headed by Bob Allen, who lived in Morristown, New Jersey, a psychologist, and a partner, Saul Pilnick. They had been hired by, I guess, one of the government agencies to determine, back in the '50s, back in the '50s, after the war, ... why African-Americans, mostly black families that had moved from the South to get into the war production and to earn money and relocate, why, when their kids came up here, and were never in trouble in the South, suddenly, they're on drugs, they're stealing hub caps, there are all kinds of problems. ... It won't surprise you that what did they identify? peer pressure. A kid would come up from a place, where he had been, and he'd go out with his friends and they'd say, "Let's steal hub caps, tonight, or let's do this," and the kid would say, "I

don't do that." Within a short period of time, the peer pressure was too great. So, these two psychologists then devised, they called them "norm change strategies," to change the norms that were affecting these children. They, then, began to apply it to business and industry and Super Market Institute, which was then the first trade association, then developed a program involving norm change strategies and they were the consultants. I was so impressed with their work that I hired them to come in and subjectively survey our company. Now, when they did this research in the supermarket business, ... they identified fifty of the best companies and fifty ... that were not so good, by measures of profitability and other standards, and, when they began to look at things like training, honesty and integrity, sanitation, those kinds of issues, they found there were negative norms or positive norms supporting those different kinds of behavior. ... So, the whole objective of their research was to help companies identify, "What are the norms that work in these critical norm areas? What are positive and what are negative, and then, how do you go about changing norms in a company?" and that has to do with leadership modeling and training and the like. So, we hired Bob Allen, and Bob and Stan Silversweig did a subjective survey of our company, including me and my brother-in-law and our other key members of the executive committee, and they came back to report to me on the results. They said, "Allen, we don't think we can help you." I said, "Why?" "Because you're the biggest problem the company has." I said, "You're kidding." "No, we're not kidding." "Well, tell me about it." "Allen, you have an enormous amount of respect and affection from your people and they want to help, but you're not letting them help. You believe that you're a participative kind of manager; you're not, and you're not willing to let them make the mistakes that they need to make to grow. So, unless you're willing to begin to change some of ... what you do, we don't think we can help." Well, I went home and I told Joan what I was told and she said, "You're going to spend too much money on that." [laughter] But, I understood fully what they were talking about, and I realized that, in my desire to really help people, I was not listening enough, I was not delegating sufficiently, and I really, then, arranged for them to begin their organizational training with me, my brother-in-law and the rest of our executive committee, vice-president of sales, human resources and the others. ... We began extensive orientation and organizational training development throughout the company. ... Throughout, I mean, department managers and people who are part-time and full-time as well, and we began to spend as much as 135,000 [dollars] a year in consulting fees to do this. ... Every two years, we would take our entire management group away, including our store managers, to conference centers. We went to Bear Mountain, we'd go to the Poconos, where, for two nights and three days, we would meet and discuss our strategies, but we also fed back to each other. We had learned the feedback process, and were using ... Johari's window, which was a method used in which, ... as we communicated with each other, we all could see each other, but we didn't know what was on our backs and we didn't know what was in our subconscious. So, in order for us to communicate effectively, we had to develop trust and trust only comes by understanding each other better and in multi-dimensions.

PC: Can you spell Johari's window? I am not familiar with the term.

AB: Well, the names of the two guys were Joe and Harry. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The Johari window, invented by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, is a group-based personal evaluation exercise. Typically, one person describes themselves by selecting a number of adjectives from a set list. The other members of the group also choose a number of adjectives from the list to describe that person. The two lists are then compared and analyzed.]

PC: Got it.

AB: Okay.

PC: Now, I understand.

AB: So, part of our organizational training would be, ... and we would do this whenever we had our entire group off campus, we would start out, and we would have as many as seventy around the circle, ... and we would start taking turns, just talking, and we'd talk about our family, we'd talk about our wife or our husband, or our father or mother. It won't surprise you, with Freudian psychology, how often a mother or father came into the talk, and, sometimes, positively and, sometimes, not so positively, and then, we'd talk about what's going on, our feelings about the company, and what was astounding is what people were willing to share and talk about. So, we would learn about somebody's problem with an illness at home or a marital problem they were having or any kind of problem, and, in doing that, then, we began to understand each other as human beings, not as clerks or managers or subordinates or bosses, and that would be followed by exercises in the feedback process. ... The feedback process is that we would have working groups, for example, it would be me and six members of our executive committee, and the ground rules were, you had to ask for feedback. So, I would say, "Sandra, we've been working together now for some time and I would really appreciate your feedback about how we've done in the past six months," or whatever it was, "and I want to know not only about things that you could tell me that are positive, but what is it that I'm doing that's getting in the way, what is it that I'm doing that's affecting your job." ... Lots of times, that feedback was really very tough to take, and I'd be thinking to myself, as I got some of their negative feedback, "Don't they know who I am?" okay. [laughter] ... I would go home and I would say, "Joanie, I'm really excited about how I believe I'm developing as an individual leader and what I see happening in the company, and I'd like you and me to learn the feedback process," and Joan would say, "Let's stop that feedback crap." She was very, very cynical about the potential, but, I want to tell you, within a year, we had doubled our profit, increased our productivity by at least fifteen percent. We had signs of people growing with their responsibility. We had a culture of teamwork and communication and we became a very, very special company. In terms of any industry standards, we had sales per square foot of selling that were three times the industry average, average sales that were over three times the industry average, turnover that was two or three times the industry average, profitability that was five times the industry average. So, we succeeded by any standard, and the profitability became just the report card. ... The objectives were what kind of company we wanted to be, and we had a very specific mission that dealt with culture, innovation and reward and recognition. I'll give you a copy of the mission statement.

PC: What year was this, approximately?

AB: This would have been; well, it began in 1968. ...

SH: 1968.

AB: 1968, with all the research we did, but it was not really until the middle '70s, actually, 1978, when we opened up the first model, where we were able to put into practice everything that we had strategized, and the first one was the Short Hills store and, everything we did there, we then began to do throughout the company.

PC: To give me a context, in 1968, when you started this, how big was Kings at that point? How many stores did you have, approximately, just off the top of your head?

AB: Twenty-six.

PC: About twenty-six.

AB: Yes.

PC: How many employees, total?

AB: Probably about thirty-five hundred. We were operating under two names. One name was Kings Super Market, "With love from Kings." All correspondence was signed, "With love from Kings," everything, and, occasionally, we'd have a customer complain about something, "If that's what you'd call, 'With love from Kings,' forget it," [laughter] but it was really corny but realistic. ... You know, one of our objectives was always to exceed customers' expectations. So, for example, if something went wrong in a store, a customer ... slipped or [was] injured or something broke on her clothes, ... that customer would get a call from me or our president or the store manager, or all of us, and we would say, "Sandra, we understand that you had an accident, that this happened; are you okay? Is there anything we can do to help?" Every other company, and it's true today, they were advised by their insurance carriers and their personnel people, "Stay away from them, stay away from them. You'll wind up with a lawsuit." Our experience was, if you offer an apology and help and a concern, there are no lawsuits, that people file lawsuits when nobody gives a damn. So, we did things that were unique. If a customer was dissatisfied with a turkey they got on Thanksgiving and they called, there would be another turkey there for them. I mean, ... we really had an incredible company. For example, [during] blizzards, our produce trucks never, never were unable to deliver fresh merchandise to the stores. We never had a store closed. We never had a store open past opening time in blizzards and snowstorms. We had managers and people hike or walk from Westfield, New Jersey, or other towns, to get to their job in time. Now, if we had a severe problem with weather, we would ... not close the stores, say to people, "Stay with each other or stay at a hotel," and we'd pick up the expenses. ... The number of people that we had with perfect attendance was absolutely astounding and, when we had people with perfect attendance, we would honor them at one of our annual service club dinner dances, which we had, and we sent a couple of people, Italian people, to Italy on a trip, as a reward, and arranged for [them] to be at the Vatican, at one of the meetings with the Pope, you know, at one of the large sessions. So, we did things that were very unusual, I think. Then, in terms of diversity, we had about fifty different ethnic, national, racial groups in our company and we always celebrated different holidays. So, at Christmastime, we would have ... some of our Catholic associates talk about the significance of Christmas and we'd have a Christmas party for our employees and their families. At Hanukkah time, we'd have one of our Jewish folks talk about Hanukkah and its meaning, and we would do that [for] Easter and

Passover. So, we had Norwegians talking about what Christmas was in Norway, and the whole purpose of this was to help people understand people different than themselves and their own practices and their own cultures, and we know that contributed handsomely to our teamwork.

SH: You had talked about two different Kings.

AB: Yes.

SH: The "With love from Kings," and what was the other?

AB: "Kings Super Market, where Mr. Joe saves you dough." I was describing one as a mass marketer, catering to the mass market, and Kings, "With love from Kings," with everything we had done in realizing what the needs of customers were in our locations, we then began to target a market willing to trade some price off for a higher level of quality and service. ... One of the things that we realized is that service, how people were treated, how people related to our people, was a value-added that figured in to whether people believed the price was a fair price or not. ... It took us longer for a store to come to mature volume than some of our competitors, because, when customers first came into a new Kings in a new location, or we had renovated a store, enlarged it, and then, reached out to a larger market, the first thing they saw, in addition to outstanding quality and sanitation and cleanliness, were higher prices. So, it took them longer to recognize ... what the added value was for that than it would the customers, say, of someone merchandising price alone. So, it would take us about two years to reach mature volume, but, when we got there, they were our customers, yes. So, there were really two different Kings in that respect.

SH: By 1978, then, how many stores were there?

AB: Well, there were twenty-six.

SH: It stayed the same.

AB: It stayed the same. ... What would happen is that we would open an additional store. The last store that we opened was Store, I think, #52. That meant that, during our lifetime, we'd opened fifty-two stores. Some of them had been closed or replaced. Now, the numbers of stores might be up to #60 or #65, something like that, yes. ...

SH: Why Marks & Spencer? [Editor's Note: British retailer Marks & Spencer purchased the Kings Super Market chain in 1988.]

AB: Oh, it's interesting. I was always very active in the food industry, the trade association, and it was good business for us, because we were a relatively small company, you know, compared to the giant chains. ... Being active in the food industry, first, the Super Market Institute and the National Association of Food Chains, and then, when they merged, they became Food Market Institute, ... I was a vice-president of Super Market Institute and I was the chairman of Food Market Institute, our national trade association. Because of our size, we didn't have the muscle, in terms of buying power, really, to influence the people that we dealt with at the lower and

middle levels in the large food companies, but, because of the relationships and network I was able to build in the food industry, where we knew the CEOs and the chairmen of the major food companies in America, first of all, they were able to use us as their testing grounds for pilot programs, to get direct feedback about their products, and I was able to use them to get help or assistance when I needed it, when I couldn't get it from the lower levels, because they didn't have the authority to do it. For example, Super Market Institute had a "president's conference," they called it, and, once a year, thirteen retailer presidents and thirteen manufacturer presidents, Nabisco, Pillsbury, National Cash Register [NCR] Company, and other food companies like that, Campbell's Soup, Heinz, the CEOs of their companies and the twelve retailer presidents were invited, and we were always the smallest company to be represented. Most were larger public companies, although some were private companies of size, Publix, for example, in Florida, and Schnucks in St. Louis, we would be away for three nights and four days, living together in groups of four. We'd live together with a food industry [couple] or two other couples, and then, we would have our business meetings together, we also had recreation together, golf or tennis or whatever. So, we got to know each other very, very well. The chap who was CEO of NCR was someone I got to know well, and these were the days of mechanical cash registers, before digital registers and scanning, and they'd come out with a new Class 5 Register that enabled you to ring up more individual departments, five instead of three. As supermarkets began to expand in other fields, you needed not only groceries, produce and meat, three keys with which to register a transaction, you needed five or more. So, NCR came out with a new class and Leo Keefe, who then was the branch manager of the New Jersey region for NCR, refused to give us the discount that we thought we're entitled to, the national discount on an order that was substantial. So, I picked up the phone and called the CEO of National Cash, explained the problem to him. I would never ask anyone to do anything that I didn't think was appropriate, where I thought I was asking him to do something for me that was not right or that could not be done for others, but he interpreted the policy the way that I did and we got the benefit of that. We had a close working relationship with Campbell's Soup in New Jersey, and other companies, Nabisco in particular, and Warner-Lambert, and they would use us to experiment and we could call on them also when necessary. ... So, those relationships in the food industry were very important. Now, that's a long-winded way to get to Marks & Spencer. ... I had first served as a vice-chairman, vice-president, rather, of Super Market Institute and I was in line to be the president. I was bypassed and I was really upset. My dad, by the way, had been a director of Super Market Institute before me. I learned that one of the key people and owners of Stop and Shop, which is a public company, Irving [W.] Rabb, had lobbied against me during the nominating committee meeting, because I lacked the "muscle". That meant that my company was too small and I had not demonstrated enough. In retrospect, I think he probably was right, because that was really just before we broke out from the pack and became someone that everyone was emulating. I didn't tell you that five years earlier I was named one of fifty visionaries in the supermarket business, for what our team and I had done to change the face of food retailing, beginning with our Short Hills store in 1978. So, I was chairman at Food Marketing Institute, which was really very exciting for all of our people. Imagine how our people felt at having their chairman recognized and their company recognized, and having visitors come from all over the world to see what we're doing. Much of what we're doing, by the way, had come from the visits we had made abroad, in Carrefour, [a French hypermarket chain], in [Groupe] Casino [Supermarkets], a French company, in Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury and others. After the war, the supermarket companies in the United States tended to focus on efficiency, reduce shrink, reduce labor, and,

most of the produce sold in the United States was self-service, pre-packaged, not bulk, as it is today. When we went to Europe and spent the time we did there, as a result of the Food Marketing Institute European management conference that brought us to Europe and Scandinavia at least once a year to visit the leading supermarket operators, we realized that these operators were concerned with perishable merchandising and bulk lot only efficiency. The merchandising was exciting, the emphasis was not on saving labor or reducing shrink, but giving customers what customers wanted. So, much of what we did was learned there, and, you know, my dad had always said to me, "Son, you don't have to be the brightest guy in the world or the most inventive. Just look at what the other guy is doing and, what you like, twist it to what your model is." ... He was absolutely right and so we got to know Henry Lewis a director for Marks & Spencer and the director of food. Marks & Spencer was about a twelve-billion-dollar company, sixty percent in clothing, soft goods, and forty percent in food, and they were state-of-the-art in controlling microbacteria and in sanitation. ... I got to know them well and, even though we were "David" and they were "Goliath," they liked what we were doing, and they would send people to us, to do some training with us and see what we're doing, and ... we would visit them all the time. So, Joan and I have a date with the director of food, a guy by the name of Clinton Silver, also a director, who was naming another director of food and was becoming the vice-chairman of the company, and Clinton wanted us to meet him and his wife. So, Clinton picked us up in his car. Now, ordinarily, you know, the English salaries, as opposed to the United States, the executive salaries, at the top, tend to be lower, but their perks were incredible. Apartments, homes, limousines, you name it, that's how they lived. Ordinarily, we'd be picked up by anybody from Marks & Spencer with a car and a driver, but, this time, Clinton is driving himself. Joan's sitting in the backseat, I'm in the front seat. On the way to meet his wife and the other couple, the new food director and his wife, he says, "Allen, you know that we've been thinking about making our entry into the United States and we're looking at the possibility of a partnership, taking a position with a partner in a supermarket company on the East Coast, and we wanted your help. Do you know of anybody? Do you know of some company that's doing between four hundred and five hundred million a year, that's close to the Concorde [supersonic jet], that's somewhere between Washington and New York, that believe strongly in the value of their people and their customers?" ... I say to him, "Clinton, offhand, I can't think of anybody, but, when I get back, Joan and I and our people will give some thought to it and I'll give you a call." Joan taps me on the shoulder, "Dummy, dummy, don't you understand? Clinton is asking you if you're interested in becoming their partner when they enter the United States?" I said, ... "Clinton, is that what you're asking, because, if you're asking me that ... and if we want to sell the company, forget it, I don't. What are you asking?" "Well, you know J. Sainsbury bought a minority interest in Shaw's Supermarkets in New England," which is true. "They bought fifteen percent, and what we'd like to do is, buy fifteen percent of your company, or as much as you want. We'll take a minority position." I said, "Clinton, thanks very, very much. I don't think so, but let me give some thought to it." So, Joan and I met, when we returned we included our sons also, who were not in the business at the time, our president and chief operating officer, and we had an outside board, which I had organized, and began to talk about it and the conclusion that I came to was, it really didn't make sense ... to sell a piece, you know, fifteen, twenty-five percent, because there wouldn't be enough cash involved to make it worthwhile and, besides, no matter how much cash there was, I would have a rich English minority partner looking over my shoulder. So, I called Clinton. I said, "Clinton, thank you very, very much, but we have no interest in it," I was also working with Alan Smith, who was the director delegated by them to

take the responsibility for their entry into the United States. Alan called me back and he said, "Allen, I understand why you're unwilling to enter into this, but I'm going to make an offer to you on behalf of our board for your company, and I hope it'll be an offer that meets all of your people needs, and an offer you can't refuse." [laughter] So, I say, "You're wasting your time, but go ahead." I have often been criticized, by my wife and some of our associates, for being much too information-oriented, much too research-oriented, much too detail-oriented, but I find that's what worked for me, personally, and for us. So, we had a five-year plan, operating and financial plan, right to the bottom line, that included the action plans necessary to get there, with a projection of what our cash flow and earnings would be. We also had a management team in place for succession, if anything happened to me, between Jim Meister, our present chief operating officer, and my wife and our team, [so] that business would continue without me, and we had a solid history of earnings, with a projection for future earnings that was very solid. So, we were really a jewel for acquisition. So, we met with our financial advisers and we then looked out five years from now and concluded we should proceed, ... most people who operate a business, a private business, a family business, never are interested in what their business is worth, right. "Why do that?" If you're not interested. ... When you do find out what your business is worth, it's always far greater than you ever thought it was. So, we get together and we now decide the offer that they have presented is an offer that gets our attention, but we think we should do better, and we go back to them with an offer that was twice what their offer was. ... We decide that the senior partner in our law firm will be the head of our negotiating group and we're delegating to him the responsibility for meeting privately with Keith Oates, who is Marks & Spencer's chief financial officer and has the responsibility for negotiating this deal. Alan Lowenstein calls back after the meeting and says, "Allen, I'm sorry, they're not interested." "What do you mean they're not interested?" "I gave them the price and I said, 'Take it or leave it.'" I said, "Alan, you're the guy that we asked to do that and that's how you do business?" I couldn't believe it. "That's what's always worked for me." I couldn't believe it. I get off the phone. This was a deal we wanted to make and we would have made the deal at more than the offer they made, because we had another company, a subsidiary, that was going with it, too, SME [Company, Inc.]. So, I say to [myself], "What am I going to do?" Well, fortunately, the guy that I'd negotiated with, Alan Smith, and who would be my boss if we sold the company, was out of town. I couldn't reach him. That gave me the opportunity to reach out to Lord Raynor, Derek Raynor, the CEO of the company, who had been made a lord for everything that he had done for the UK during World War II, by the way. ... He called me, "Allen," I called him, "Lord Rayner." [laughter] "Lord Raynor, I've just learned that you've turned down the proposal that our attorney made. The reason I called is this: I believe that you and I both want to make this deal and I believe that you and I both believe this would be the right company for you to start with in the United States and ... you would be the right firm for us. So, if we're going to make a decision to walk away, let's you and I make that decision, not our hired guns." "Let me call you back, Allen. Appreciate your call; we'll be back in touch with you." He called back, "Let's start again." We made the deal. If Alan Smith had been there, it never would have happened, because he would have not had the authority to do it and it would have gotten short stopped along the way. So, again, we're talking about how timing is incredible. So, we made the deal with Marks & Spencer. ...

SH: This was in ...

AB: 1988. After we had begun to negotiate the deal and we're nearly there, Marks & Spencer acquired Brooks Brothers. They had made two entries. The whole purpose in acquiring Brooks Brothers and our company was to open up Kings Specialty Stores, a small specialty store, a concept we developed not unlike Whole Foods in their merchandising, but smaller, and Brooks Brothers throughout the United States, in the shopping centers controlled by Edward J. Debartolo and Federated Department Stores, which was then owned by a Canadian by the name of Robert Campeau, and Campeau owned Brooks Brothers. ... Marks & Spencer paid 750 million for a company doing two hundred million in clothing, Brooks Brothers, that should only have been worth about two hundred million, because their earnings were only twenty million a year, but they paid five hundred million more in order to get the first rights of refusal and the options on the shopping centers. Campeau and Debartolo were good friends and willing to do this. When Campeau went sour and Federated went into bankruptcy, now, the options and the rights of refusals were worth nothing and they could not proceed with that plan. So, that was their plan when they bought our company. Now, they did have an opportunity, at that point, to really buy other companies who were interested in selling to Marks & Spencer, and I mean good companies, a company like Giant, in Washington, but they tripped so badly with Brooks Brothers, after they acquired it, that they didn't want to grow Kings until they could demonstrate that they could add value to a business. The English turned out to be terrible acquirers, wherever they acquired business, certainly in the United States. When we made the deal, by the way, part of our agreement with them was that they would not visit our stores without our knowledge; they would not drive up in their limousines with drivers, because we needed to keep this very, very quiet, [because], possibly, the deal may not be made. The first thing we know is, we had a call from the West Caldwell store, "There's an English group here that drove up in a limo and car. Is there any reason why I should permit them to see the store?" I said, "No, we don't know who they are. Why, tell them to go away." [laughter] So, that's how they behaved. So, now, I meet Alan Smith. By the way, he and I negotiated the deal in the Tip-Top Diner, on Route 3 in Clifton, and, after the deal was made, he said, "Allen, I couldn't believe how much coffee you drank." [laughter] You know, we'd meet for three hours, right, clandestinely, in this diner. We were into norm Change Strategies and two way communication, as I told you. I didn't tell you though that we taught *I'm OK, You're OK*, [a self-help book written by Dr. Thomas A. Harris, published in 1969] transactional analysis.

SH: Really?

AB: Yes. ... In *I'm OK, You're OK*, you're taught how not to get hooked negatively and ... how not to be a negative parent, one of the ego states. That was the language that we taught everybody in the company, including our part-timers, ... and we needed a language that did not focus on the individual. By the way, I have to tell you a story. Dad and Mom were still shopping in the stores after Dad retired, in one of the original stores in Short Hills. It was cherry season and Dad would come into the stores. ... People liked to see him, "Mister. Joe." They really liked him very, very much. He would reach into the cherries and take a handful and start to eat them and one of our norm change strategies was reducing shrink. Well, do you know a big hunk of the shrink was eating? We called it "grazing." In other words, employees who took food off the shelf and ate it, contributed, to shrink we were trying to teach our people how that affected our company adversely. So, the program was very effective. We would have people hired from other companies and the first thing they would ... do would be to grab a peach or

they'd grab something, cold cuts, and eat it, and our people would say to them, "Look, we don't do that here. You do it again, I can tell you, and you're picked up, you're not going to be here, because that's not how we do business." So, here, having put this program into effect, and it was really effective, Dad walks in, ... picks up a handful of cherries, and a clerk says, "Mr. Joe, you know, you're not being a very good model here in our shrink program. Now, we have a norm program underway to reduce shrink, and you're not being a very good model." My dad says to him, "Screw the shrink program." [laughter] "Screw the shrink program." That was Dad. ... We became the first company in New Jersey to have Weight Watchers come in with their program, in-house, to see, instead of going to Weight Watchers' headquarters, wherever they are, [if] they could be effective in house we would invite our people, on a voluntary basis, from all [areas], part-timers, full-timers, managers, clerks to participate, and I was one of them. ... At the end of each session, and at the end of the program, each of us would hold up a bag of fat, suet and bones, representing the weight that we had lost. So, because apples were on the Weight Watcher program and we wanted apples for lunch, we would purchase [them]. You know, my family and I paid cash for our food, like everybody else did. We never lived from the expense of our business, and so, when we wanted apples from the store, we paid for it. We paid for the apples, and then, they would be delivered from the distribution center to our offices. Well, people in the company who learned that, thought that that was a negative norm; they thought we were eating the apples without paying for it. So, when we finally realized that, we made sure that everybody [knew]. ... You know, one of the things that we were learning in our organizational training and development was what's important was not only what you do, but what people thought you're doing, okay. [laughter] So, that was, I thought, an amusing story about the Weight Watchers. So, I meet with Alan Smith. I said, "Alan, before your executive committee." His wife their human resource exec, a financial exec, an operations exec and a perishable exec... that was their executive committee, and that was the same executive committee that ran Brooks Brothers in New York. I said, "Look, let's you and our executive committee go off campus. We'll spend two nights or three nights, a couple of days, away and just get to know each other, learn about each other, and try to develop some trust, and, if you think we need it, we'll have a facilitator present to help us." "Allen, don't ever mention psychology, don't ever mention psychiatry, behavioral scientists. ... We don't do that, okay, and we want no part of it." I said, "Alan, I'm really surprised, considering what I know of your company." By the way, as time went on, it was evident ... how badly they needed it and didn't do it. ... At any rate, I say, "Well, look, let's have a meeting of ... your executive committee and our executive committee once a week. We'll call it our steering group." He agrees to that. So, once a week, we begin to meet and we have our first meeting. John McCallum is the Scotsman who's in charge of operations, Joan Smith in human resources, Mike Taylor in perishables and Chris Littmoden is the financial guy, and Alan Smith, of course, and, we've got Jim Meister, our president and CEO, our vice-president human resources, our chief financial officer, a woman who is our vice-president of internal/external communication and consumer affairs, and ... I start off the first meeting by saying, "Look, before we get into our agenda, let's first just go around the table and let's give everybody a chance to hear about what's going well. Since we're now together as one company, what's going well? and then, afterwards, we'll then go around the table again and see what else is out there? What roadblock is out there that we ought to consider and add to the agenda today?" So, we start around the table and we start with the Marks & Spencer group. Mike Taylor says, he's not saying anything good, he says, "Allen, I have to tell you, the most disturbing thing I find here is going into one of our stores and being called by my first

name by some produce clerk." [laughter] Alan Smith says, "Mike, you'd better get used to it. That's the culture here." We then come to Jim McCallum. "Allen, we have a serious problem here; we're not kicking enough ass." [laughter]

SH: This is the positive round.

AB: I didn't know any of the middle managers they assigned. I knew Alan Smith and I knew Mike Taylor, because they would visit us, ... but I didn't know how they operated, and I say to myself, "These are the middle managers that the board sent in to help us succeed?" It was unreal, and then, the things that they did, that the middle managers tried to do in merchandise and operations, was to do exactly the things they were doing in London, that worked in London, but might not work here. For example, ... we knew that St. Michael, which was their brand, their brand of cookies and candy and other products, were sensational and that we would have no problem with it and they would be unique in our stores, but the way they introduced them was to barrel in hundreds of the items without any introduction of the items, and, of course, they didn't sell, except for the holiday cookies and candy, and it really failed. So, I had made my mind up that I would stay for a couple of years, and I as was required to by my contract. Incidentally I could have had as long a contract as I wanted, three years, five years. I said, "Look, I'll take two years, and then, we'll see. If I like you, I'll stay and, if you like me, you'll want me to stay." I decided to leave after two years, because I realized that what I could do for the company is to get them to get their middle managers out and let our people run the company. So, I went to a board meeting in London to introduce Jim Meister as the new head of Kings, with their approval, and I left, and what I succeeded in doing was having them get all their middle managers out and let our people run the company and to take advantage of everything that they could bring to bear, but it was quite an exercise. ... We now are operating together and the first thing we learn is, there will be a monthly meeting of the heads of the various departments, sales manager, grocery, merchandise, all the department heads and the top executives, to review the results and to account for the differences between what the objectives are and where we are, and, at the first meeting, Lord Raynor who was there and began to really go after our people, because we're off target. So, I said, "Lord Rayner, I think it's important to remember that there are fifty-two weeks in the year and we, ordinarily, are not concerned about a thirty-day result. We will act on it, to correct action, but, if we have been required by a decision we make to reduce labor or increase gross profit and prices in a certain area, we will not do that, because we know there are fifty-two weeks in the year." Well, that's called, forgive my language, Sandra, having "fuck you money." [laughter] That's what it's called, and I was able to do that, ... but I want to tell you, even in the face of everything I'm telling you about Marks & Spencer, they had their money out in five years. Kings was a jewel and we just were a solid company and, as it turned out, and we were so excited about what we could learn from them. For example, they had produce people all over the world acquiring merchandise and they would be able to bring, as a result of their power, merchandise that we either couldn't get or couldn't get in sufficient quantities. The next thing we know, Mike Taylor, the head of produce for Marks & Spencer, is in our distribution center making notes about who our suppliers are, so [that] they can go to our suppliers to buy, [laughter] and the next thing we know, they're taking our meat people to London to teach them. But, I'll tell you the one thing that was true of them. They really educated the world of food in what's called the cold chain, protecting perishable merchandise from the moment it's manufactured or grown until it is eaten and they do that through every step and timing in

temperature and humidity and that includes in distribution. The interesting thing about Marks & Spencer is that that's the result of Chaim Weizmann's friendship with Michael Marks the M&S founder. Chaim Weizmann was a chemist in London and very involved in world Zionism. The Weizmann Institute, in Israel is named after him. He was a close friend of Michael Marks and Israel Sieff. Michael Marks was the Polish Jew who came to London, without speaking the language, put up a pushcart with a sign on it, "Don't ask the price, it's only a penny," then, went from a pushcart into a stall in the public markets, then, operated stalls in many of the public markets; met a cashier by the name of Spencer, that's how Spencer came in; eventually bought out Spencer's interest, and that was the beginning of Marks and Spencer, and, now, probably 112 or 115 years ago, founded by the Marks and Sieff Family. They were an incredible family, and we knew, Lord Marcus Sieff and his wife, Lady Lily well. We had met them, before they had acquired us, when Marks & Spencer became a member of the Food Marketing Institute European management group. So, we learned that Lord Sieff was coming to the United States to visit the stores, which he hadn't done up until that time. So, Joan and I invited Lord Marcus and Lady Lily Sieff to our home for dinner with Jim Meister and his wife, our son, Rob, and his wife, and Alan Smith. Abigail Kirsch of Culinary Productions did the catering for the dinner party. ... Mike Murphy, the bartender, was not only the bartender at our dinner party, but ... at the dinner party that Abigail Kirsch, Culinary Productions, had catered for Derek Raynor and the Marks & Spencer group earlier. So, after the dinner party is over, Mike says, "Allen, I can't believe the differences between Lord Sieff and Lord Raynor." I said, "What was it?" "When Lord Sieff came in, I didn't know who he was. He put his hand out. He said, 'My name is Marcus Sieff. What's yours?'" I said, "Well, how about the Lord Raynor?" "When Lord Raynor walked up to the bar, he said, 'The Lord Rayner will have scotch and soda,'" [laughter] and that was the difference. When Marks & Spencer began to reduce their workforce on Baker Street, which was their headquarters, Marcus Sieff came to the office. He had to be carried out. I mean, he was so upset, so angry, he had to be carried out. Unfortunately, he's since died, and I think Lady Lily has died, also.

PC: I have got to go. [laughter]

SH: This will conclude our session for today. I thank all here, with the caveat that we will all get together in the next few months. Thank you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We are going to continue now.

AB: Okay. When supermarkets first began, they began with concession operations. So, if a person was a grocer, or his family were grocers, they were the landlords. They would either build the store or rent the store, and then, they would lease the meat departments or the produce departments to concession operations, or, if they were a produce merchant, they would lease to grocers, and that's how it was. We were in concession operations probably later than most, because we still had concessions in the store, meat concessions, one operator operating all meat departments in all the stores, and one produce operator. Perlmutter Brothers in meat, Schofel Brothers in produce, until 1951, and that was one of the reasons that Dad was having trouble in '47, because, during the war, ... anybody could make money. After the war, when it became a

battle of competitors, if you didn't operate all departments yourselves, you were really at a great disadvantage. ... Dad didn't go into the meat business or produce business because he didn't have the confidence, as I told you, he really had never learned how to delegate, how to surround himself with the right people, and, he didn't have confidence he could do that in meat and produce. That's why he stayed in the concessions so long. My former brother-in-law Len Schechter and I were instructed to learn the produce business and the meat business. So, in 1949, Len and I would get up at four o'clock in the morning to go to Somerville, New Jersey, where I was a produce clerk and he was a butcher, learning the meat trade, and we did that for, I think, well over a year, and working seven days also, and a couple of nights. So, now, we ... took over not only the departments in that store, which was a new store, but two other stores. So, now, we need a place in the terminal, ... the market terminal in the Miller Street Market in Newark, which then existed, where we could bring produce in from New York or elsewhere, by truck or rail, and then, distribute it to our stores. So, I now have to have a union contract with Local 863, our Teamsters. Remember, I told you, the Teamsters were controlled by Longie Zwillman. The head of the Local 863 was a fellow by the name of Freddy Gravagna. Now, in those days, the union heads were called secretary treasurers, not presidents. Now, they're presidents. Let's see, I would have been, then ... about twenty-three or twenty-four and Lou Silver, our personnel director, about thirty. He was the first head of our new personnel department ... when that was organized, circa 1950. So, we make a call to the union to make a date with Mr. Gravagna. His office was on the top floor of the office building overlooking Military Park in Newark and his desk was in front of the window as we entered and, as we enter, there are two guys that made me look like a midget, and their chests are bulging, and we know they have guns and they really are not the kind of characters we were glad to be surrounded by. ... Gravagna says, "What are you doing here, kid?" and I say, "Mr. Gravagna, I am here to begin discussions about our contract for our distribution location in the Miller Street Market. We're going to have all of six full-time employees and six part-time employees." "Here's the contract, kid," and he throws us the terminal market contract and their contract is not the contract that supermarkets have in the area, because the conditions were quite different, but, in doing that, he's expecting us to be at a severe disadvantage against our competition. "Here's the contract, kid. Sign it and get it back to me, and not only that, kid, you're buying your bananas from Sorce, you're buying your watermelons from Gongami and you're renting your trucks from People's Trucking. You got it, kid?" So, I say, "Mr. Gravagna, since you're running our business, why don't you come to our office, ... where you obviously think you ought to have the right to make those..." "Listen, you little cocksucker, one more word and I'm throwing you out the window." Pardon my language, Sandra, but, with that, Lou begins to jab me. [laughter] "Lou, you're hurting me." He whispers in my ear, "Allen, he really means it." [laughter] So, I go home and I'm [saying], "Joan, is this what I learned at the Tuck School? Is this what I learned at Dartmouth College, collective bargaining? Joan, I'm going to the FBI. I can't believe that this goes on here." My wife now, ... she probably was about twenty-two, maybe, she said, "Allen, do you like concrete shoes or leather shoes?" [laughter] I said, "Well, I prefer leather shoes." Well, I thought about it and I thought I had no proof of anything. So, what did we do? We bought our bananas from Sorce, our watermelons from Gongami and I rented our trucks from People's, and, by the way, the people we did business with were wonderful people, obviously under the control of or fronting for "You Know Who," but that was just an experience I thought I'd relay, that was part of the scene. We did have a wildcat strike when Dad was still active in the business. I'm going back now. I guess it was the year I came in, 1948, because ... we then

had a grocery distribution center, we're operating our own grocery distribution center, and he had spoken to a driver by the name of Willie Cuff. The union found out and there's a wildcat strike, because they accused Dad of getting in the way of collective bargaining. So, Dad calls Puder and Puder, a regional accounting firm. ... They were the accountants for our meat concessions and he knew Uncle Billy Puder well, to get his advice about who should he talk to, and he says, "Joe, let me give you the name of a lawyer in Newark." The lawyer's name was Meyer Ellenstein, connected to Zwillman, and he gives Dad that name and the telephone number, and Dad calls and says, "I've been recommended by A. H. Puder to call you, to tell you about my problem. When can we get together?" Dad describes the problem. He says, "Joe, send me a check for three thousand and we don't have to meet." So, Dad sent him a check for three thousand, it's over, and Ellenstein, ... may he rest in peace, [laughter] who became Mayor of Newark and was part of that corrupt scene, a very well-known lawyer, ... that was who people were sent to when they had a problem. ... A. H. must have known about it, because he was too sophisticated and too involved in it himself, okay.

SH: Great story. We will continue at another time. Thank you.

AB: Okay.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/28/08

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/29/08

Reviewed by Daniel Ruggiero 1/27/09

Reviewed by Allen I. Bildner 11/19/08