

Interview with Albert Flax

**Interviewed by Susan Hawes
Baltimore Neighbor Heritage Project**

Interviewed on May 31, 1979

**Transcribed by Alex Bryan and Eric Steinberg
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Susan Hawes (SH): The following interview is being conducted for the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project in the Hampden Woodberry community. The informant is Mr. Albert Flax the interviewer is Susan Hawes. Today is the 31st of May 1979. We are at [1029 West 36th St.](#) (?)... Is from Lithuania and I wonder if you would tell me about their reasons for making the trip with or without their parents and their experiences coming to live in Baltimore...

Albert Flax (AF): Well my father came over here before his parents did and he came with my uncle who was married to his sister so that would have been his brother-in-law. The reason for that was in those times most of the people had immigrated from Europe, Russia, and the subsidiary countries around there where they didn't have much money, and they were poor. And of course they called the United States the golden medina-- which means the streets made out of gold. Everybody thought and heard that your fortune was to be made here, that the conditions of living were much better, you weren't suppressed or oppressed and in those days that was a dream and then immigration was wide open. I think they accepted most everybody. So that was the thing that people wanted to do that were of a contrary religion or poor and thought they could do better. They all wanted to come to the United States and that was the case with my father and his family. So he came over here and I think he was in his early teens and he wound up in Baltimore. My uncle who he came with wound up in Norfolk Virginia. Now my mother was only a baby, a year old when she came over so evidently it was her parents that she came with. She came I guess more or less for the same reasons, I guess for better opportunities. To get away from suppression, depression, or poverty. I feel that my grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side were a little better off than my father's side- of course none of them knew each other then. But I want to say my mother was a year old and of course [her?] mother died when she was a baby and my grandfather, her father remarried his wife's sister. And she was really my grandmother I mean the only one I knew and she was a tremendous person, you know a terrific person- and she held the whole family together. She sort of ruled with an iron hand. Her word was law. And my grandfather was I guess a tolerant type of man and he went along with everything, he was a real lovable person. So that's about the story there.

SH: You said that your father came over in the *Bremmer Hobbins*?

AF: The *Bremmer Hobbins* that was the name of the ship. I remember it was the *Bremmer Hobbins* and the port that they left from was Bremen, I think that's in Germany.

SH: Do you think their religious oppression for Jews in....

AF: I hadn't heard too much about that, no. But I do know that where he worked as an apprentice, the man he worked for made uniforms for the Cossacks. And of course the Cossacks-- the people were afraid they had what you called [pogroms](#). They go wild and just start raging through a town burning you name it, everything.

SH: Your father, he became a tailor?

AF: My father became a tailor. I don't know why or how that they said, his parents probably said well we're going to send [you] to another town. Now where they sent him or how far I do not know but it was away from his home and he might have been eight [or] nine years old. I remember him telling me and as an apprentice with a tailor there must have been some type of an opening they heard that was available and they said that's what he's gonna do. But he started off taking care of farmers' little babies insofar as probably feeding them and even diapering them and he told me he even milked the cows and then I guess after a period of time he was allowed to do some type of tailoring work you know, until he learned how to handle things.

My father when he came to this country couldn't have been more than fourteen [or] fifteen years old. He was a good tailor. A fine tailor I mean he opened his first business here in 1915 with a partner, a man who he had met in his travels as a tailor. He was an expert tailor, he could make clothing, suits, anything that was necessary to make a suit for a person [be]cause it was called custom tailoring. [Be]cause in those days it wasn't much, you were just getting into the industrial age where everything was mass produced and of course as time when on the mass production of men's clothing became more prevalent. So like I say when he came to this country he had no real ties and I guess he needed money so he traveled around. I'm sure he was sending money back home to get his parents over here. And of course they did get over here. My grandfather, his father, was a carpenter. And I don't remember him at all and [my] only recollection of him is a picture that I saw. My grandfather died not long after they came to this country but my grandmother lived, and she lived with my uncle, and she lived with us for a while and she was an elderly lady when she died. She was probably well into her eighties when she died and that was I guess in the 20s. Of course the same thing happened to my uncle, he was my father's brother, they sent him out to another town I don't think it was where my father was, and he became a shoemaker. So that was his trade and he also established that trade in this country when he came and he when he was married. He opened his own shoemaking shop. It was at Cliff and Hudson St. and they lived there in the same house. The shoemaker shop was on the first floor in the front and the rest of the house was in the back and second floor and so they had everything going together there. And of course their living quarters were absolutely private from the other trades, but lots of people that came to this country lived together with their store.

SH: How did your mother and father meet up?

AF: My father, I don't know the sequence of this, but he worked for Shunoman (?), but he also worked for a company called Sonneborn-- I think there's a building called the [Sonneborn Building](#). [it is] still called that but its at the corner of Pratt and Paca St. He worked at for this tailor clothing manufacturer, and he was a journeyman tailor and he'd been to Florida, St. Louis, San Francisco. Anyway, when he was in Baltimore he probably was working for Sonneborn and lived in east Baltimore, had other brothers and sisters too. Seems that my father, what I understand, was walking on Lexington St. on a Sunday where the Lord Baltimore Hotel is [called the Caswell (?) Hotel]. That [is] where all the young people hung out and they would meet each other there and sort of socialize and do whatever. There were several halls where they had dancing, and he might [have] been on the way down there...and he sees this young lady looking at the pictures in the lobby. It was a theatre, movie theatre, and he must have approached her I guess you call it a pick up. I don't know. [Chuckle] And my mother was a very shy person though and evidently he asked her where she lived or something and he probably got in touch with her for a date. But I do know that's how he met my mother.

Anyway, when he went where my mother lived on Howard St., right across today from where the [Mayfair Theatre](#) is, [in those days was call[ed] the Auditorium Theatre]. Next door to that was what they called then the academy of music. That and the big movie people came along and made palatial theatres for the showing of movies-- they called it the [Stanley Theatre](#). That's all been torn down; I'm pretty sure it's a parking lot now and across the street is a little theatre.

Now my grandfather, my mother's father, he was also a custom tailor. The oldest son and he worked for my grandfather and then when my grandfather passed away my uncle took it over. Anyway I guess when my father went to call on my mother, my grandfather--in those days people didn't mince any words--want[ed] to know who you were, what you did, how much money you had or you don't bother with my daughter you know what I mean. And of course my father worked [with my grandfather] there. He got a job and he worked there for a while. And he wanted to marry my mother. He asked my mother first but then he had to ask my grandfather and I hear the story--my grandfather took him over in [Druid Hill Park](#), which was a great place for congregating in those days, and that promenade that comes right down the middle of the street that comes right off of Madison Ave. with the big arch. [Her] father says, I want to see your bankbook and I want to see how much you got if you want to marry my daughter. So that's what happened.

SH: What can you tell me about the establishment of flax in business in Hampden? Why and how it happened.

AF: Well that's after my father got married and he wanted to try to be for himself. Now in his working he met another man and he was also a very good tailor and they decided well let's go in this together, let's open up a tailor shop. And I don't know why he came here, maybe he heard about it, in the trade you hear things. I think you'll see the name Galley on there...that was his name.

SH: Jack H. Galley

AF: This was like 1915 and they got this place from Jack Galley. So then after a couple of years my father was an extremely industrious man, I mean he didn't have a lazy bone in his body- he worked all hours of the day and night if it was necessary. And I remember one time he moved us, we were living on Madison Ave. near I think it was [Oheb Shalom](#), which is now way up Park Heights Ave. They called it the Madison Ave. temple in those days and a doctor Mars Lazeron was the rabbi there. But we lived practically across the street in our apartment. When my father opened the business here with his partner, they found a little house here up on 38th St. and I often show it to my children.

SH: 908?

AF: [908](#)

SH: West 38th St.?

AF: Yup. And we lived there until I was about 5 years old. I didn't go to the first grade here. I was in kindergarten I'm pretty sure. So we lived there a few years and it was convenient for my father, all he'd have to do is walk down here, but I remember in those days they came around with quarantine signs, you got everything out of the sun. My sister and I had physteria, measles, mumps, chicken pox, you name it and they were all [the] things that were quarantined. They came around from the health department and tacked the thing up on your door. My father, you couldn't stop him from working. You couldn't keep him in the house. He used to come down here using back alleys, come down here and go to work. That's how he started the place here

SH: You remember the house you lived in?

AF: Yeah, I remember it somewhat

SH: Did you rent it?

AF: He bought that house. I don't know what he paid for it, but it had a little stoop in front and it was like that. I remember one Halloween, this was a tough neighborhood, I mean you know Hampden that was known as a tough neighborhood, lots of these guys they wouldn't let themselves be arrested, they would fight the police, they didn't take it lying down. But you used to hear the name of Black Mariah you bet it was a sort of a semi truck type thing you picked up people who were being arrested and you put 'em in there. Now they're white I believe, but we called 'em the Black Mariah and they took them to the station house in that.

The house [it] had a little stoop in front of it that was on sort of an incline on a hill and it was two stories and there was a basement and the rest was set up. There was a living room on the right and a small dining room in the back. I thought it was the kitchen and one time, I couldn't have been more than a couple of years old I you know there were kids around the neighborhood, we played, and I guess I must have told them something

like I've got a piggy bank and in those days I remember the bank as a world war one tank, and you threw your little coins in there and all, and my mother must have kept it way up there on the high shelf there- and I knew where it was. They encouraged me to get hold of that bank. And somehow or another we get in there and climbed up there and got hold of the bank. I don't remember how much was in there but I do remember we went down the corner there was like a confectionary grocery store and I knew the woman, I've seen her in recent years- she comes in the store here, Mrs. Blainey. We bought a pie, it wasn't open and it was behind my mother's back, but she sooner or later found out and I was reprimanded.

In back of us right around the corner would be Elm Ave. It would be a tremendous piece of ground where the Maryland Casualty and the rotunda now stands. As a matter of fact the parking lot was just rolling fields and went all the way down to Wyman Park, all back through there. I remember the name Farmer Brown, maybe it's not farmer Brown, but I remember he had a barn up there and he had a farmhouse. They called it the farm and that soon or later became the Maryland Casualty property. Well anyway I guess they started with Maryland casualty because they put a big storm drain in there, a tremendous pipe that a child could stand up in it.

SH: What were your friends like? Were they good friends?

AF: Well they got a little mean every once in a while and maybe they would harass me or something I wouldn't exactly call them friends, we were just playing, they're kid's. But one of the boys was sort of a little disobedient, [and] one of the kids who was a little closer friend lived around the corner. I'm trying to think of his name, Calvin. You know I bet their parents told them don't go down on the avenue you know there was a lot of traffic down there and all; [of] course traffic in those days wasn't like it is [now]. I don't remember too much except that my father wanted us to move to another neighborhood, so it was a few years I guess it was in the early 20s. He leaves Forest Park and bought a home there.

SH: When you were here how did you go to temple, synagogue?

AF: How did we go? I don't remember going.

SH: Hum

AF: I don't remember going...

SH: How did you go to synagogue when you . . .

AF: Oh I do remember the synagogue across the street from my grandmother on Hyatt St., which was old and I really wouldn't have any truth in knowing. But I like an old European synagogue with the alter in the center. Have you ever been in a synagogue?

SH: Yes

AF: So you've been. Then you know the modern alters in the front and men and women sit in the back in a theatre, but here the alter was in the center. People sat all around; there was a balcony where the women sat. Men and women are separated in synagogues except in the reform where they sit together. But it was European; it was very colorful how you might see in fiddler on the roof or somewhere. That's the only real synagogue I remember until we moved to Forest Park.

SH: Do you remember while you were living here [any] holidays that were specifically a Jewish holiday or if you needed to observe something . . . ?

AF: I have no recollection of anything like that except I do remember my mother when we lived around here on 38th St. I guess it was nothing at all for my mother to hop on a street car, street cars go down to Lombard St. Then, the majority of Jewish people lived in northwest Baltimore- they called it a ghettoized type [of] town. People live in neighborhoods but here it's sort of we're all bunched together. Well in those days when we moved to Forest Park there was Garrison Ave. but gradually I remember [Silber's](#) (?) Bakery opened its store there and there were kosher butchers, as a matter of fact where we lived on Fairview Ave. you just walked around the corner and you had two [or] three grocery stores and you could buy Jewish food. You could buy kosher food. But here my mother had to get on a [streetcar](#) and go down and she kept a kosher home and she would go down to [Lombard St.](#) I can remember her with the bags and all and she could hardly carry them and she may have spent three or four dollars and that got everything and then goes to what we called the 'mess market,' it was mass market I think. It's fish and all on Pratt St. Something about having wholesale fish here in Baltimore but that was it. And [of] course as a kid I was very sensitive in the stomach I couldn't stand the smell in there. And then on Lombard St. you'd get over and buy a chicken and of course to make it kosher they have to, man it was practically all on the rabbi, he had to slit the throat in a certain way you know or else it wasn't kosher. But when you get near those chicken stores that'll make me sick too I couldn't stand any of that stuff...

SH: Do you remember going to school here the little bit . . .

AF: Well what I remember about school was kindergarten and all I can remember is when we left to move over to [Forest Park](#) the principal and my teacher were [in] like a delegation. They all went and said goodbye and good luck and I think the principal bent over and kissed me. Nice little kiss and that's about all I remember here. And well I was only here maybe a year.

SH: Do you remember at all feeling the difference between or if anyone made you feel any different? ... The little kids...

AF: I think I was too little to understand that. I think [I can't] remember anything like that.

(Break)

AF: You mean buildings? There were no buildings during the war, they didn't allow it.

SH: But you said that affected people staying here.

AF: Oh you know of course I have noticed this right along that you keep noticing it and and I guess it sort of snowballs. The average man that is able to make a fairly decent salary and get married, most seem to move to another neighborhood. Used to move out to [the] [Lock Raven](#) area or other neighborhoods [that are] more suburban. Not in the congested area.

SH: Why is that?

AF: Trying to better themselves.

SH: Did the people who came here affect your business at all?

AF: Well lets put it this way, I don't think anybody'll ever get wealthy around here you know, it's hard. When people here had money, they spent it. When they don't they're hard customers you know. They seem to me [that] they want good stuff but a lot of times they don't want to pay for it, now why don't they want to pay for it? Because they haven't got the money to pay for it but they still want it. You've got a freedom of choice so you could always say no but if he doesn't have it at the [right] price I'll find it somewhere [else] you know.

SH: You spoke about something you noticed about people who were geared towards education around here...

AF: Well to put it bluntly and I don't want to step on anybody's toes or anything like that, but I get a lot of young kids in here you know teenagers, so forth, and I don't say all but I would give you a figure of 75% anyway have no intention of furthering their education. Would like not to have to continue their education. Right now I don't hear it as much but a few years back all I used to hear was they were interested in getting out of school and getting some wheels or they are interested in getting a car or the motorcycles. I don't know.

SH: Was that always true?

AF: Far back as I can remember. I never went into it. At one point I was very friendly with the principal over here at Robert Poole school and before he passed away, a lot of dropouts, lots of dropouts. It's not a neighborhood where it's a great affection for reading; you can go over to the branch library over there. People have told me this in Mt. Washington that like to read and they said you can go to this [branch library](#) and find anything you want. You know, it's there. And I found [this] to be the case. I've found books over there that you can't get at the average active library branch. I would have to give my opinion; I don't get the impression that they are interested in education. That they have intentions of going to college or anything. And frankly speaking, any kid that

doesn't care whether he works or doesn't work, doesn't really know how he'll make out or get along if he starts hanging around the streets- he's going to wind up in trouble.

SH: Are there any costumers that stand out in your memory, from a while back, do you remember? ...

AF: Yeah well I remember this one Mr. Bergee (?) who was the machinist. He used to come around almost every night I mean he'd sit here with my father, he'd sit here with us, didn't bother nobody. He was a very fine gentleman. Other than that various families that used to come in here. Of course I could say a lot of those families; the kids have grown up and moved away. We don't see them. And once in a while they come back and they say hello. But I guess you might say we know everybody around here, my father used to have quite a memory for names. Now I know a lot of people by names but there are a lot of people I don't know their names, I know who they are, I just don't know their names. We don't write up card tickets or anything, you would get to know names that way.

SH: What about the Hampden Woodberry Business Owners Association?

AF: Well, they are talking about change. Now there's a thing I didn't think to say. Another big change I find as far as business is concerned is the organization of the Hampden Woodberry Business Owners Association which occurred somewhere, it was right after the war so that's been well at least 30 years, maybe more. When we organized that, before that occurred there was [an] attitude of suspicion. In other words, don't you ask me and I won't tell you or don't tell me and I won't ask. In other words everybody played it close to the chest- it's very close to the chest.

SH: Was this the same for other businessmen?

AF: Yeah it's not the greatest attitude because I think businessmen in a particular area if you're sitting in a canoe and paddlin' in a different direction everybody's not going [to] go anywhere. And that's the case here it's every man for himself and good for us all. [It's] every man for himself. I think the organization, well the association helps to alleviate that a lot and form more of an open faith attitude and a mutual discussion of all of our problems. I think that's the only way you are going to make it together. I don't think we are going to make it as individuals.

SH: How did you start your business association, what part did you play?

AF: Well if you could talk to Mr. Hyatt I think he could give you more specific information. They were a group of men and of course they approached me and I was interested but I won't say I went and started it. At first I was very active you know and actually going out and taking time to do things. There was Sam Frantinagio(?) who had the fruit stand on 36th and Roland and he was very instrumental in the founding of the organization.

SH: Was it founded before the war?

AF: No I think it was after the war. I think into 1945, lets call it 30 years maybe a little more, I'm not exactly sure. I'm pretty sure it was after the war and of course we used to come up with some real nice promotional things. Maybe [it] didn't always work [we] weren't always successful but at least we were trying to do something. For instance to get the people to come here we hired a bus from the transit company and during from thanksgiving through Christmas the bus would run a regular route and we gave out circulars to show them the time and the route and they could get on that bus. I think for free and then after the second year I think we charged a very small amount something like a nickel or something and we subsidized all that. That went on for a couple of years. We used to have a Halloween parade which we sponsored and there the merchants would all contribute to that for prizes, merchandise and things. I remember one year the grand prize was a washing machine. They would come in your store and get a ticket like a raffle type thing and one year a customer of mine won it.

SH: What was the parade like?

AF: Well kids and people dressed in costumes and then they judged them. They had a big stand; it was out there in front of Equitable Trust and a couple of times it was over here in front of the church. The city used to put the stand up and you [would] get to know all these different things. What else...oh we never had Christmas decoration until the organization started. I mean it cost thousands of dollars we used to stockpile it and use it year after year. But still you've got to pay people to put it up, take it down, gas and electric company, insurance, all that stuff. And the people liked that. We try to do things for life's good will; if there are any complaints we try to handle them. Various things, and even with that they can never get to total membership that they should have. I think I went to the last meeting, the last one they had and it was early in the month and I think they said we have 75 members but the potential I think is much more than that. But they had a pretty nice turn out last time. All the merchants are interested in what's going on with the streets and everything. So all in all I couldn't say it's always been productive but it's a great thing to have. You've got to have people cooperating and so forth. We also got into mutual advertising too. We put out many times circulars with all the stores advertising so we've sort of explored the possibilities of the benefits.

SH: What other changes have occurred in your business?

AF: Well the big changes are the prices. Not only in pricing, I go back a long way. I told you we had shirts for 95 cents back in 1937, 1938, and 1939. You could buy one of the finest shirts, a top brand for \$2.95, beautiful stuff. You could buy a mighty nice suit for between \$35 and \$50. Now the price they charge are unheard of- they're up in the hundreds. One hundred and fifty dollars is nothing to see for a suit.

SH: What does that mean to you? Well what did it mean to you before you started liquidating?

AF: We got the class of trade where people don't dress up. When do they buy a suit? For a funeral, maybe for a wedding, or they'll rent a tux maybe. They're not tie wearing, they don't like to button up their neck and wear a tie, it's too stiff and they like casual wares, that's been the big thing. It's taking away from the suit category. But at one time we sold quite a few suits. Still with all these purposes I mentioned, not that a man was going to wear a suit night and day, but wear it on occasion. You go to other areas where people get up and put on a suit and go to work. We don't have that kind of trade, that [kind of] workman. That area, you might have some office workers so that's the reason they wear casual. As far as prices are concerned, I mean they are just unheard of and I don't think it's ever going to work. Until the government starts to control it a little bit, price and wages, we had to do that back in the war. When I came back from the service I kept war papers and war books about the OPA, the office of pricing administration. And they regulated things then and we have free enterprise, we better watch out cause we don't know what we'll have if this keeps up. It's really hard to exist under the way it is.

SH: Did you have regular prices before the war?

AF: Yes but up until about 3 [or] 4 years ago you could raise your price accordingly, very comfortably and there was no resistance. But in the last couple [of] years it's been a lot of price resistance. So you have to be careful and watch it very closely. I remember a time when you picked up the newspaper and you saw stores, you saw Hudson's, you saw Hamburg's had a sale, and that was an occasion. I mean that was the sale. Now if you pick up the paper, everything is a sale. I don't mean anything, you know.

SH: Do you think the [Rotunda](#) and or [Mondawmin](#) [Mall] affected you're . . .

AF: You know we hit the panic button here a lot times. When Mondawmin opened everybody was crying the blues, oh that's gonna kill us. It really didn't. Because after a few years it turned and it's a black shopping center and I would say that people here don't go there. The Rotunda, they've got a great supermarket up there they have a restaurant but I don't hear people running up there for clothing. Maybe they shop the supermarket, I don't know. But I don't feel that it's affected us too much. We go up there for dinner sometime and I'll see a person here or there that I know from the area but I wouldn't say I see lots and lots and lots of people. The urban shopping centers are everywhere you turn. I guess the overall effect hasn't been good. But it hasn't helped because people jump in a car. Of course we get a lot of walk-in trade in this closely congested area here. And the people [who] live 2 [or] 3 blocks away they'll walk down, but if you get in a car and you don't see a parking space its very easy to get out on the [JFX](#) and ride out to [Security Mall](#) or go up here or there [to] the Reisterstown plaza.

SH: What was that today do you see any big differences in the neighborhood...today?

AF: Well the only big difference today is sort of a status quo- its not an aggressive neighborhood and stores here aren't aggressive. The only big changes [are] they're fixing the street out there trying to make it nicer. They want it to be sort of uniform. All the stores will have sort of a brownish tone in the front, they made us take all the signs down

I think that was good it was ugly with all those signs sticking out. Their going to have new sidewalks, I've seen pictures of the brick and if it looks like the pictures then its going to be terrific and we are going to have street lights like the inner harbor. We are going to have fences and trees and they were discussing the other night about they're going to use little white bulbs for the Christmas decorations.

SH: What do you think about (inaudible)?

AF: They claim it's helpful, they claim that after all this is done we will see a difference. Now nothing happens without effort. You got to start doing something, so we had one of our meetings. We had three men, one was the professor at the [University of Baltimore](#) and [he] tells us to take surveys. They all seemed to be experts. They said you can beautify a neighborhood all you want, you can renovate and revamp it but it's the stores that are there that count. In other words if you don't have the right kind of businesses nothing will help. We don't have much of children's shop[ping] around here. They never seem to be able to make it here, I don't know there are so many kids, but I don't know. Another change commercially is that you had a furniture store in the eleven-hundred block along side of Sandlers(?) called Bakers Furniture. They sold out and the [Goodwill Industry](#) took over. The movie theatre closed up and eventually the [Salvation Army](#) came along and took that over. Now this I don't call good commercial tendencies. I don't think that is conducive to the type of business were looking for. People go in there and buy second hand stuff. It is like [a] cheap place that takes away from a man that is trying to sell retail at a profit, if you get my meaning. Little changes going on up on Falls Road near where Grim's(?) is out of there now and some pizza thing is coming in. There it's the influx of antique shops. If you notice there are 3, 4 or 5 of them up there that's not too bad. I don't know, that should bring people from other areas in. I think people of more affluence would be prone to go to an antique store. If a man is struggling for a living and he's got a large family to raise and he doesn't have much money, he is not going to go buy an expensive antique.

SH: Why do you think so many of the old businesses are closing down?

AF: Yeah a lot of them are closing down. Well I saw Jack Larman(?) the other day and he says to me he's disgusted. He's had enough he said, too much aggravation. Why do stores close down? It's because the man [has] been at it too long. I've been at it 45 years and that's enough. Don't you think those are pretty good reasons? I have nobody to continue this place. My daughters are married, their husbands do something else all together which is what they want to do and my son is doing what he wants to do. He's a lawyer and he just got married and that's it. So there is no continuation as far as I'm concerned.

SH: Does it make you sad?

AF: Sort of nostalgic I guess you might say, yeah. I don't know I'm a kind of a fellow I'm not a warrior. I figure things will work out. I also know that nothing works out unless you sort of get in there and make it work out.

SH: What do you think about...the tendency in the country in general-- what directions do you think the country is going?

AF: Well I get the impression that the country from what I read in the press and what [I] hear and listen [to], are anti [Carter](#). I personally think he is in there trying like the devil to do his job. I think he is a sincere individual but his problem is he is not like [Johnson](#) and [Ford](#) and [Kennedy](#) and [Nixon](#) that have experience in the congress and Senate. They know the workings of those organizations. Jack Anderson one of his big problems is he brought the wrong people in with him.

SH: Let me ask you one more question about you-- It's hard to put your finger on it but my opinion is you will never curve this inflation. It will just keep going; you just keep filling a balloon [and] it's going to burst. That's what people say and that's what I say, has to burst unless Uncle Sam steps in and does something about controlling prices and wages. I think there is too much government. Now I'm talking about getting the government in to do something. I'm saying here there is too much government, too much control of telling everybody what they can do and can't do and so forth and so on. It looks like as far as the world is concerned (inaudible) but that's about the state of it. Everybody acts like they want it to but they will talk first. We got plenty of problems here so that is what I think....Would you say that you have had a hard life?

AF: Well as you can see I have never missed a meal in my life. I have often thought about that, the people going hungry. I've never had to do that. I can't say I have had a hard life. I haven't been at a point where I would say I want to get this I want to do this I want to have this and just go do it, have it or get it with no consideration, I can't do that. I did some things in my life that I am very happy I did. Married two daughters gave them big weddings my son was bar mitzvah'd. Gave him a big affair which, I couldn't do it today if I had to because the cost is getting so exhorbitant. (inaudible) [I] bought a home that's paid for and all the cars we've had. [As a] matter of fact the cars I think just went up and I have to make some kind of decision or else I wont have anything to get around on, there is the bus. We have never really, really wanted for anything but as far as luxury or above and beyond--forget it.

SH: What do you think the main thing that helps you get along when you felt bad when you've felt low?

AF: Well I'm the kind of a guy that's not real easy. I go to bed depressed and I get up in the morning and it's another day. I don't hold grudges I can have a few words and the next day I don't remember what it was about so it doesn't bother me. I'm the kind of fellow I have hope for the future and I always try to, if there is a problem or a situation, I try to figure out what did I do, who is it I can talk to. Funny thing in the morning when changing I do a lot of thinking. Many a day I've gone on ahead of schedule, I thought wow I did this today I did that today, I have to do this. I think to live pessimistically and sort of drag everything down and look for obstacles is not a good way to live. I think you have to have hope. You think well [there] must be something I can do to make it better.

SH: If you had a chance to live your life over again is there anything that you would do differently?

AF: If you do what you think you would like to do it takes guts. I got a feeling today a lot of the youngsters don't really know what to do. I know what I would like to have done, but it takes guts. I say after the family starts to come along you lose that attitude of taking a chance. You say well I got this and I'm making a living, why am I going to go ahead and do something else and put my family on the fine line. Maybe it won't work out and where would we be then, so you take what you got.

SH: What is it that you would have done?

AF: Well I would have been into writing, artwork, I love to do cartoons and I've done a lot of that. [As a] matter of fact I started off when I was a kid. I remember doing the [Roosevelt](#) elections. I used to sit there by the radio. I was just a teen, a young teenager listening to all the things on. I got the biggest kick out of that and then I would draw something political. I was an amateur, I did go to [Maryland Institute](#) for a year or two at night and I did go to a school of anatomy for part. Its called a charcoal club in fact, matter of fact when I went from the newspaper I knew [Yardley](#) he was a big cartoonist for the [Sun](#) and I had great admiration for him. I went to see him once, he looked at some work and he said well [it's] got a lot of possibilities. He said well why don't you go up there join the charcoal club, which he was a member of. They had nude models there and that's the basis of all art to draw the human figure. I went for a couple of seasons. But I would have liked to have gotten into all those things, writing, and newspaper work.

SH: You mentioned that your father didn't have a Christmas tree.

AF: Oh yeah, well see that's what I meant because I didn't know any different. I don't remember saying why don't we have a Christmas tree, but I do remember that when Christmas was over and we didn't know it was over then I saw trees laying in the ally with tinsel all on them. Then the trash people had to pick them up so I dragged the trees into the house and said I wanted the trees. I thought it was a good thing.

SH: You mentioned that your parents moved because they felt...

AF: Well I we never actually discussed it

SH: Ok

AF: I'm afraid I'm exercising this prejudice a little too much. It really wasn't that way. I was a small kid, I didn't know anything about that and my father didn't sit down and say now were moving to Forrest Park and here is reason number one reason number two. I remember hearing my mother talking to my relatives. Harry wanted to get him near a Hebrew school, for our religious education. He wanted a synagogue nearby and we lived two blocks from the Beth ti filah which was one of the biggest congregations in

Baltimore. I remember as a small child when they dedicated me we started to go to Hebrew schools at an old cottage. In those days if you did anything out of the way your teacher would take a ruler and smack you over the hand with it in school. Then the Beth Tfilah started getting bigger and they finally built a big building there and they secured the services of a rabbi Samuel Rosenblat (?) he was considered the dean of rabbis in Baltimore. In those days there was no television and there was no radio then. When this rabbi Rosenblat was dedicated into, or inaugurated into the [Beth Tfiloh](#) synagogue, they had this big ceremony and of course everybody was invited. I remember I went as a child and his father Yesselah Rosenblat was there and he probably sang. They wanted him to be a big opera star, he wasn't a big man he was a little fellow, rabbi Rosenblat, small man. He never went into that because he wouldn't shave off his beard which I guess was the older Jewish person-- your hair had to grow to a certain length you don't have to have a beard, but your sideburns have to be down a certain length but the ultimate of that is a beard. That's why he wouldn't shave off but he could have been a big opera star. As a matter of fact he appeared in the film with [Al Jolson The Jazz Singer](#). He was in that. Like I'm saying, it was just my father wanted better, and better for him was this that I could get the right education that he thought was right and a little better neighborhood but it was a hardship for him because he didn't drive a car. He never drove a car- never had a car- he would have to take the street car and you have to transfer to get over there so he never got home before 10 o'clock at night.

SH: Could you describe what you imagined and what you saw was a day for your father? A day working here at the store?

AF: Well my father was a very early riser. I would imagine he would be here at 7 thirty in the morning. I remember you couldn't hold him down, he'd be here early we'd say why so early, well it's true a lot of people around here get out early they do, but his day would be really close and ready made clothing and he would and if he had to put cups on them or whatever during the offering he did that. He didn't have the latest equipment but a lot of quite obsolete equipment. Instead of a steam presser the presser he had [was] a big pad and it sat on a wooden block which tailors would have used, but it became obsolete. He pressed on that and he had cloth that he'd put on top. A lot of people would come in and I guess knowing my father was so industrious; they want to get their pants pressed while they waited so he'd do that. He had people from a homesale place that would come in and pick up cleaning. My brother in law is a [CPA](#) which everybody knows what that means. He did cleaning, prepping and alterations. My father did alterations and then when he sewed something he would have to alter it and everybody was in a hurry so he did it while they waited. He pressed pants, a lot of ladies would come in and I remember as a kid they were always wanting to shorten their coat something. He'd have to measure it off and then shorten it, he'd say well this buttonhole is worn out and fix [it] like that lining that he could do a new lining. Men's clothing the same way, he would renovate them from top to bottom if necessary. He had bolts of cloth they selected and said, well I want a suit, and he'd make a suit for them if they wanted it that way.

Then as time went on it came more and more ready-made and he got away from that and when I finally came with him in 1937 he had gotten away from custom tailoring. I

remember it was even after the Second World War a man came to him from Young and Newton, it was an automobile company. Mr. Young's father, doctor Hugh Young was one of the famous Hopkins doctors they mentioned 3 or 4 names at Hopkins and his name is always one of them. Old doctor Young had a full dress suit and would have been this boy's grandfather. Mr. Young came in from the automobile place said to my father; my son wants to wear his grandfather's full dress (?) to some kind of a prom. I guess it didn't fit him perfect and he altered it.

SH: What about when your father was still starting the business when you were younger not necessarily living here but in this area do you remember what the customers were like?

AF: Well most cases here would have been semi skilled to laboring class of people they worked in the mills. That was the big thing around here. They had the [Mt. Vernon Woodberry mills](#) that had headquarters down south somewhere it was in Georgia. They had the [Hooper mills](#) that was a local organization. Hooper mills started back during the time of the clipper ships and what they started doing was making the sails for the ships that's what they wove the duck whatever the sails are made of that's where they started. Later on before they could continue the operation they were making cloth for pants and ladies suits and things like that.

SH: Do you think all the customers came from just the Hampden area?

AF: I would say the greater percentage came from the immediate area. In the twenties there were enough cars but it wasn't like it is now. People didn't have cars and they bought where they lived especially around here. I remember as a kid my mother would say well lets go down to daddy's store and you would come down there. I remember as a kid it was like a sea of people here, just mobs. Saturday was the big day, Saturday used to be payday everywhere. Now it's Thursday, its Friday sometimes Monday it has changed. Over the years it wasn't that way on Saturday night. I remember when I first came here and we opened. We remodeled the whole place and opened the men's store with all the haberdashery and the accessories we would stay up till 10 [or] 10:30 at night on Saturdays we got away from that.....

SH: Was there any problem with security when you used to...

AF: None whatsoever I mean you didn't have to worry about a thing. People could walk freely, nobody even thought about anything like that. Today they would all come out at night. You come down here 9 o'clock at night looks like a ghost town people will not come out, especially the older crowd.

SH: Would you describe your partnership with your father? What was business like there?

AF: My father said he bought this property because-- I own the property here and I didn't go to college, he wanted me to go but not too many people went to college then. The only

ones that went were the people that were sort of affluent. If a guy came from a wealthy family that was college it was sort of a status thing to do. I always felt sorry for my father. He worked so hard and without any regards to himself, but when it came to his family he wanted them to have everything. He wanted me to go to college and he would have sent me but I didn't go. I went to work when I got out of high school and first thing I did I worked on [the Baltimore News American](#). They started me, I really wanted to get into the editorial department but the job was for an office boy in the accounting department and whatever it was I took it. I knew I was in a newspaper plant but then I got into advertising and with that I got to know a lot of the writers there. Rodger Pippin (?) was sports editor there and he knew me so I'd go up to him on the weekends and get assignments. I think it paid a dollar and a quarter fare to get there, to go out and pick up scores [of] golf matches, tennis matches, automobile racing. Didn't make too much money I guess my father thought well I was in my late teens but I think we are going to open a store where I am and I want you to come in with me. Well if I had done what he had told me in the first place and gone to college it might have been a different story altogether. I was not ever scientific minded I don't think I was cut out for that I don't know what I would have been cut out for, but I guess it wouldn't have hurt. Maybe I would have been something else all together. Anyway that's looking back and so my father said we will do it together. He says you're my son and maybe we can make a thing out of it. So I left the Baltimore News after a couple of years and I went to work at the (?) Company in the men's department and there was where I wanted to get experience. I worked there one or two years in the men's department and it was a great help and I learned a lot of things. And things I didn't know about menswear, couldn't learn too much about buying because I wasn't a buyer, I was a salesclerk. So I learned a lot about selling. Learned a lot about merchandise and then the time came and I left. These were houses years ago. This building must be at least 75 [or] 80 years old and it was a house and they were all houses and it was called Cherry Row. In the original day you walked along the sidewalk and you see one of them coming to the house and you walk down some steps and the house is sitting below the level of the street and then it was all converted this building was built by a plumber his name was Bitley(?). My father bought it from him; I think he bought it in the very early 30s. We remodeled the store and I remember one time I went down to Baltimore St. with my father and we saw a window, [it] was a Goodman's Shoe Store. We liked the way it was fixed up so we had an architect and we told him what we wanted. We took that kind of a front end and we opened up I think it was 1937 in the fall and that's the way it [has] been ever since except about half way through that time we remodeled again. It was because we left the back rooms as it was and my father had his shop in there for the tailoring. We took out the sewing space. We need the room and this is open porch, we closed all this in and my father used to do, you can still see the old sewing machine and the iron back there. My father used a hand iron not an electric iron. That thing weighed a ton, he wound up with arthritis, and he could barely pick the thing up. He had that heavy hand iron, old sewing machine. I remember we knew a couple a guys that worked in factories that were mechanics fixing machinery. This one man I particular said, yeah they haven't manufactured those for 50 years or something like that, and to get even needles and things they had to find out a couple people that had something that would fit in there. Even the sewing machines people say to me, well why couldn't you sew, well first of all I

had no ability in those lines and second place only my father knew the combination of the sewing machine. It had a broken treadle(?) and somehow or another he knew how to operate it with a broken treadle(?).

SH: Do you remember what the clientele was like then?

AF: Well we had modern mill workers and back in the late 30's before the war there was a lot of railroad people. Railroads were a big thing and a lot of people worked on those. People here were associated with the Baltimore Transit Company. It was streetcars, lots of people worked for the streetcars they were semi skilled, unskilled, more in the skilled line I'd call it. There was a lot of carpenters, painters, crafters all in the manual trades. I remember one different field they called them--machinists. A machinist is capable of making tools I would say that a good tailor can make a suit, a machinist can make the tools he works with. That's also a dying field such as railroads. We had guys that would come in that were machinists. They had the Bowmar(?) corporation over here in the west Woodberry. Bowmar Corporation made motor parts, they made things connected with the railroad. We had one particular where a customer and a close friend who used to come here and kind of spend time with us in the evening. He was a bachelor, very fine gentlemen. He worked there as a machinist and he was very good at that.

SH: Do you remember what do you think it was once again, just people from the Hampden area?

AF: I would say so, now the big change occurred. You want to know about this big change?

SH: Sure I was going to ask you if you could just refer to what your prices were like.

AF: Well we opened up our store; we had a line of shirts. This was a sort of lower priced shirts, 98 cents. Necktie for 50 cents, you could get a darn good necktie for 50 cents. I mean it was what they called hand tailored, nice fabric. Today I look at these ties, they made them wider so there is more fabric. In those days the ties were narrow but everything goes in a cycle, in a circle. If today the wide tie is popular, you can be sure one of these days it will go back to the skinny tie. If a pink shirt is popular now and two years from now nobody even wants to look at pink. You can be sure one of these days it will be pink again or whatever, wide lapel, narrow lapel it keeps going around in circles. Yeah neckties 50 cents. Socks I guess 35, 50 cents for a pair of socks would have been very expensive. Pants, you could sell nice pants from anywhere from 4 to 5 dollars. Jeans, you would get the nicest pair you want, and they weren't all styled up like they are today. I mean the good makes like Lee and all those companies, 4.95. Remember then an alley(?) shirt, we had the Manhattan shirt, that was a top product, 2.95.

SH: Did you ever have any aristocratic families that live around here?

AF: I specifically don't know about aristocratic but the older families and forgetting the names of all. I'll have to really think about it, I remember a couple names for instance a name like Bull, b, u, double l. There's a lot of them around here by that name.

SH: Any of the older mill owners come in?

AF: No...I wanted to tell you this before...Roland Park is on the outskirts [of] Guilford Homeland. Well some of the chauffeurs drove big cars for wealthy families up there [they] lived in Hampden and they got jobs riding the car. They knew my father. One time there was a famous movie star [Richard Berthelmuss](#)(?) you wouldn't know him, never heard of him. He was a big star and he was visiting a family up in Roland Park. He must have said to the chauffeur he says, I'd like to get my suit pressed or I'd like to get something done, whatever it was. The chauffeur says well I'll take you to this place. So he brings him here, my father was quite a movie fan in those days and boy he got a thrill out of that. I think he was here a couple of times and he sat in the back there, in the room, in his underwear while my father did the work on the clothes. [laughing]
Of course there was one other place, it was a machine shop, Poole [Poole and Hunt] machine shop. That was a smaller firm and they employed a lot of people. The 2 bosses, they were the two owners. They came in here; it was called the Pool Machine Shop. Dowmar (?) wasn't locally owned at the time, it was like a subsidiary somewhere up in Pennsylvania. Hooper was the only local mill. I guess I can't recall all of them; of course executives would come in.

SH: Did you enjoy working on... (mumble)

AF: I loved it and if you're out of things over a period of time and you get to a point where you don't really love it so much anymore it gets to be like a drag. But I liked it, I looked forward to it. I couldn't wait till I got there in the morning because I have to do everything. My father didn't buy; he was a great salesperson in his way. I might not have approved of some of his methods, but he was good. People liked my father and that's important. [If] somebody likes you they have confidence in you. They even speak of him today in remembrance. [I] had to do the buying, had to do the selling, even did all the cleanup work, as a matter of fact quite a bit. I dressed linens myself too, made all the signs, tickets, [of] course we had professional help but there were times when I did it myself, when we didn't have professional help. Maybe for a period of years until we got a hold of somebody else. He took quite a bit of funding, like when the salesmen would come in from different manufacturing places. They would set up a showroom in a hotel and call me up. (Undistinguishable) I [would] say well I can't come down Tuesday morning; I've got to be in the store. When do, I go Sunday and many a time I would spend the whole day Sunday from like 9 o'clock in the morning sometimes until 9 o'clock at night buying the merchandise for the next season. Then we'd have an apparel club too. We had an apparel club where they have but everything, jewelry, lady's [clothing], children [clothing], furniture. They all have the shows and they visit our max, they call it the max. They exhibit at the civic center. [It] used to be at Washington too, at the Sheraton. We go in there, we even went to Philadelphia, to the max there and that's where you could get... End of tape 1:37.51