

NAME OF INTERVIEWER : MRS. EVE HORWITZ (EH)

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE : MR. JOE JOFFE (JJ)

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EH
How many brothers and sisters did you have

JJ

Well we were seven children altogether, an elder sister, her name was Sarah
elder brother Kashriel

EH

What was their difference in ages

JJ

About two or three years...then I followed, then a sister Chaya, she was left
in Russia, she was not well and nobody of our family know her fate, we dont
know what happened to her, then Harry who has become a very successful business
man in South Africa, and then is a sister Shlomit who lives in Israel, married
to an American, a very nice family, quite a few grandchildren and my youngest
brother Shlomo who got killed about six or seven years ago in a car accident in
Sfat and he left a wife and four sons, three sons are married and one is a
bachelor, they all live in Ramat Yechanan

EH

Would you know how old was your father when you were born

JJ

When I was born, I have no idea...I can tell you when he passed away, I think he
was about 42, he wasnt well, I imagine he suffered with stomach trouble, what
actually the illnesses were I dont know. I dont know what to start telling you,
I dont know what you want to know but maybe the things that I remember vividly
was my cheder days

EH

Yes I'll come to it...I just want to know what was your father's occupation

JJ

He was a produce dealer and subsequently a grain merchant

EH

Did he employ any people

JJ

No he did not employ people...he had as far as I remember a very good and honest
reputation, he was at one time the gubbay of the chassidishe shul in Plungyan
and this is a period I think the period we should start talking to give you
information. Now as I tell you I remember my cheder days, I remember running
away from cheder, we had built a new house in Plungyan and the rabbi told me
not to run away and I knew there would be visitors in the house, and I knew
there would be some sweets and polony or something that visitors used to bring

so I ran home, I think I was just over three, and I fell on the corner of the stoop of our new house and I cracked my nose in half and it occurred to me that what the rabbi said I got punished for running away from cheder, then I wouldn't let them do any medical attention until they gave me some coins or sweets, and that was done by a felsher, do you know what a felsher is, and this is why as you see I've got a crack on my nose

EH

Tell me about your father's occupations, was he ever out of work

JJ

No he was not out of work, I think that my late mother sort of inherited, what they used to call an "achsanian" a little pension in Plungyan, I think there must have been room for travellers to sleep over a night to leave parcels, to take messages and I also remember we had a cow, which used to give us a lot of milk and butter and cheese

EH

Who looked after the cow

JJ

I don't remember, everybody, they used to help...in the yard my late father had a big store where a lot of small livestock used to be kept, like a lot of geese and poultry and turkeys, a lot, I would say these must have been in the way of hundreds, I remember turkeys

EH

Was it just for the family use

JJ

No it was all for sale, buying and selling to other merchants, he had a horse and a cart and he had a partner by the name of Yosef Levinson, there is a story told that Yosef Levinson has decided to get married for my late father told him to get married and they went to a little place to see a wife, they arrived in a place and they went in and they saw a lady and they had tea and they came out in the yard and to attend to the horse and to relieve themselves, the idea was to relieve themselves on the horses' hooves in those days, the urine was believed to strengthen the hooves of the horses and he asked the late father, he says do you like her, he says you've got to marry her, not me...he said, look if you like her, then I like her and he married that woman...he came back to Plungyan and he carried on the business of poultry and grains, and this must have been around 1912, I remember the yidden had gone crazy shouting about the release of Bayliss...they ran about in the streets like wild, screaming and shouting, I think it was 1912, and I remember that my late brother Kasriel and late Joe Davner were given specially made winter coats and they were so long that they would walk on the coat, they would trip on it and fall on their noses in the snow because the coat had to last for a number of years, for when they grew up and subsequently, occasionally I was allowed to put on Kasriel's coat but I couldn't walk, I would just fall... and I remember one winter we stole a sleigh with a horse and there was a little ride in town, in the centre of the village and we went for a drive

I dont remember who the promoter of the trip was but I remember we got a hell of a good hiding, not from the owner of the horse and sleigh but I got a hell of a good hiding from my father and mother, I got a lot of hidings in my life

EH

Do you remember what age was your mother when you were born

JJ

No

EH

Was she much younger than your father

JJ

Not very much younger

EH

Did your mother help your father in the business

JJ

Oh yes, oh yes...I remember my late mother was the kind of PRO...I also remember very vividly and she used to talk kootz before meeting the poretz you know what a poretz is, his name was Kashilnes, and I think I'm right in thinking, my memory is always good, she used to kiss his hand when she used to meet the poretz...he was very good to us as far as I know, he used to help with produce and poultry in selling or some livestock with which my late mother dealt with, the other thing I do remember is that when world war I was proclaimed or broken out and before they were chased out from Pumpian to Russia, I believe that Kashilnes or another farming friend had taken a cow away for safe keeping and this cow her name was Brilla, and this was our mainstay after the Russian Revolution when we came back from Vitbesk, Poneves and she got the cow back, and only God knows what we would have done without having had the cow after our return from Vitbesk to Ponevez and not Pumpian...in 1914 we left by cart and horse to Ponevel, Ponevel was the birth place of my late father, we arrived in Ponevel and we stayed with relations of our family by the name of Sacks. I remember the two brothers ~~Xikur~~ ^{Oscar} and Joe, Oscar is still alive in Johannesburg, and is married and has two children, a girl and a boy...the girl is married to an El Al pilot who comes from Klerksdorp, the boy I dont remember but I'm told he is well off and so is the father, and Oscar who is supposed to be a second cousin of mine is in New York, whether he is still in New York and alive, I dont know...we stayed a couple of days in Ponevel and we proceeded by horse and cart to Raveshik, in Raveshik we came and we stayed with our late aunty Rochel who was a sister to our late father, their name was Orelovich...this was the place where we saw for the first time in our lives a train, after staying in Raveshik for a short period we left for Dvinsk by train and in Dvinsk we were met by an uncle Shimon who was an

elder brother of my late father, he was in wholesale cloth business, he was a very nice looking man, he had one son, I think his name was also Kasriel, his leg was slightly impeded and this boy became an engineer. Their fate I don't know...we stayed in Dvinsk in a type of a flat accommodation and I remember having seen quite a lot of military personnel up and down Russian army people. From Dvinsk we left for Ritvesk

EH

Why did you move from place to place

JJ

We had to move from place to place, I imagine it was some arrangement they made between the brothers because in Vitbesk there were two more brothers Zalman, the other one's name I forgot for the moment, and Zalman had left Vitbesk for Moscow, and he had a small business of cloth and pieces of dress material which was by arrangement given to our late father to manage, and we started off that business. This was approximately in 1915 and it was in the centre of the wholesale businesses in Vitbesk. Now being new in the business we all had to help work, so I remember that I started selling suit lengths and given a street to go from door to door and sell the suit length and come back, leave the money, and take another one and this went on for a long time until we made some gains and we became prosperous in a way that my late father and mother became the owners of the business. There was another uncle whose name I forgot, was Shmuel, Uncle Shmuel had a big wholesale cloth business, we were not in any competition to them because ours was a small business but my late brother and I we used to watch where people would come out from another wholesale business and go up to them and say uncle or auntie won't you come and have a look at our business, what we have cheaper, and we managed to build up a little business till such time that I believe we had made a substantial amount of money...we lived in a houseI remember having cut my foot in half on a glass when I walked in rain and I vividly remember the birth of our baby brother Shlomo, it was Rosh Hashana morning, he was born in the morning and I was at home and I saw the whole birth story and I remember that I was sent to the shul the first day Rosh Hashana to tell father that the baby was born and subsequently came home and my late father came with the Balkreah of the shul with the shofar and he came into the room and said "Goot yomtov" and he says "Ken eech blozen them shofar" (can I blow the shofar) so my late mother said "bloz" so he blew the shofar this was the arrival of the late Shlomo, the one who got killed in Israel He got killed on his birthday, his 60th birthday

EH

Was it a custom if somebody was born on Rosh Hashana to blow the shofar

JJ

It was a mitzvah (good deed) I don't know if it is a custom, but it is a mitzvah always when you blow shofar and

so this was an incident which one can ever hardly forget. I was then going on for about 8 years approximately, and evidently during those years our parents in conjunction with our uncle decided that we should invest in a property, and we went to look at a property in one of the main streets in Vitebsk and a price was arranged for this property and I shlepped along, we took along bread and salt to put into this building and when on closer examination of the building it was discovered that it was right next door to a Catholic church, so the deal was off and no property was got, evidently there was some prejudice against it so what had happened to the accumulation of money I should imagine that we increased our business, and we had to get some secretarial help or bookkeeping help, this is a very very involved story this secretarial help...I dont know whether you want me to carry on with it. Now she was a Zeitlin girl, she had a brother, this is already I'm jumping on account of these two people to the Revolution, to the Russian Revolution. He joined what party I dont know but he was the anarchy and the girl was in the Communist Party, and she still worked for us, but she had a very high position in the communist party...the shooting interludes that used to go on in Vitebsk every night between the various political groups such as the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks and the Trotskyists and the Lenins and the White Russians, all of them, every night there used to be sporadic shooting...in the morning when you walk out in the streets all you would see is maimed people. In the main street I passed by once and I saw just a head, a human being head bleeding out, and then subsequently I think the Communists got the power hand and all the Anarchists used to be collected up by the Communists and brought before a Communist Court in the park in Vitbesk, a beautiful park, it was in the open and they had their trials and most of them were given a sentence of death, put on lorries with machine guns, taken out of the town, shot and buriedbut when we had decided to leave Vitbesk, we left the shop and gave the keys to this girl, I dont remember her name, that boyfriend of hers was instrumental in helping us leave Vitbesk for Lithuania, for Ponevez , so our whole family whatever we could take alongwe came to the station in Vitbesk in the middle of the night, we were all together inclusive of late grandfather his name was Yehuda Asef Kotzen, who lived till 105, and we were given, on the station, we were given cholera injections under the shoulder blade, I think the size of the injection was no less, I think it must have been a four inch/ injection under the blade, cholera, we were then pushed in an ordinary goods truck, or cattle truck, and I think with 42 people...there were some wooden racks, shelves in the truck and some time during the darkness the train pulled out, I dont know where, but we did arrive in a place called Baranovich which was under German occupation. We were all taken to a camp with barbed wire and the following day, then we had to go

through a process of delousing and we had to stand up on benches and we were sprayed with some stuff, and then we were given our clothes and we were given bread, German brown bread with a little marmalade and black coffee. Now how long we stayed there I don't remember but it could have been three weeks, and then we were put in a truck again and we were sent to the Lithuanian border, every where you looked was under German occupation lots of shooting, lots of killing, and you couldn't ask questions...when we arrived in Ponevez in the middle of the night, we had a lot of shooting and a hell of a noise of fowls screaming their heads off...what transpired to be is that there must have been on the station a truckload of fowls going somewhere and thieves broke in and stole the fowls and took them out one by one. The arrival in Ponevez was that we had nothing

EH

Why didn't you go back to Pompian where you came from

JJ

I don't know why, I believe I was told that Pompian was razed to the ground by the Cossacks, there was nothing left of it, Ponevez had a bit of a Jewish centre, had about four synagogues, three synagogues I remember, maybe four, and this was still under German rule...a military orchestra used to play every Sunday afternoon on a square and we lived in a very small kind of house, we had a part of a house, our landlord was Brower and he had a son, Geditke, who was a type of a....today you would call him a playboy, and we managed to get Brilla, our cow, back to Ponevez which was a distance of 24 viersts, approximately 24 miles I would say today, and I don't remember the passing space of time, what late father did, he must have dabbled a little bit in produce and livestock to try and earn a rouble, whether we brought money back from Russia, as you know you did not know what currency you had, you came back multimillionaires, you had any type of paper money but you couldn't buy a thing with it, so we moved from that place to more central situated part of a house in town where we had divided a bedroom into four or five by means of partitioning, my Zayda had one, late Sarah had one with Chaya, and I think we as boys slept in the other one and late Dad and late mother slept in a portion of the dining room...there was a kitchen with a big stove the old type of stoves which used to warm up the wall of the dining room, and late Zayde used to get every Friday morning by post ten dollars from his son in Reading, Pennsylvania, his name was Shlomo Shear Kotzen, that was his original name, Kotzen. Naturally we used to try and talk him out of the ten dollars, we knew where to change it, he was beautiful, he was so wonderful, he was so clean, I think he was married three times, his whole family were in America but it was a peculiar way, his departure, his demise, he used to go every Friday to the sauna, to the baths, and there we used to go along with him sometimes, and you know the old type of a bod (bath) was a big room with a floor and lots of big stones underneath. The stones used to be fired and

then you used to throw on them water and it would throw up steam, you were given a wooden bucket and a kind of a broom, a green leaved broom, and you used to go in there and you used to knock the hell out of your back, and then take that bucket with water and throw it over your head and come out and get dressed and go home. So after about three or four weeks when he did not receive letters from his elder son in America, he went to the bath on his own, Friday morning, and he must have been very tensed up and excited about not having received the letters and he came home and evidently he forgot to put on his trousers which he would put in the volekes, that is something which you used to put in your shoe, made out of wool, very thick, but he forgot to put his pants on, and he came home in that cold temperature I imagine he must have developed pneumonia. He used to have his glass of vodka every Friday night when he used to come home from shul, drink a glass of neat vodka and say "Lechaim", we did not drink it, my late father did not drink, and he took ill on Saturday, we had the doctor and the doctor said he had pneumonia, he was given some medicine, he was so beautiful, so spotlessly clean, his little room, the little divided room must have been six by four no more and he was lying in bed and there wasn't much room, and the following Friday about one o'clock, I went in to see him, and he said to me "Yoshka" There were a few yiddin saying "Tilim" (Psalms) and we all came and we were standing there and he was looking at us and he was looking at us, and I think it must have been about seven or eight o'clock in the morning, he looked round once in the room and he closed his eyes...and he was buried that same Friday, I remember that we laid him out in the middle of a lounge in the dining room where the Chevra Kadisha attended to him, and we know that his age was in the vicinity of 105 or 106 because his eldest son died when he was 87 in Reading, Pennsylvania. Now this was the end of late Zayda

EH

Did you go to the funeral

JJ

Yes, oh yes, it was cold

EH

Can you tell me how the funeral

JJ

I don't remember

EH

Did you wear any mourning

JJ

I don't remember, I'll think about it, if I'll recollect something I'll write it down and I'll tell you later on, but he was a wonderful, wonderful character.

EH

Who used to do the cooking

JJ

I think late mother did a lot of cooking, and maybe his third wife was still alive, I don't remember seeing her

EH

Were they kosher your family

JJ

Oh yes, very kosher

EH

Kept Shabbat

JJ

Oh yes, oh yes, very kosher, from. Our late father was the gubay of the Chassidische shul in Pumpian, I remember one Simchat Torah they carried him home, he must have had a bit of wine too much, oh yes we were a religious family, we used to go to shul regularly and eat kosher, they did not know what treif was except one day in Vitebsk I went in dafke Pesach, I had a couple of kopecks on me and I bought a pastry which wasn't kosher, and I ate the damn thing and I got the hell knocked out of me when I came home they knocked the tripe out of me and I was locked up, I remember that

EH

Did you go to shul

JJ

Oh yes we used to go to shul and daven very religiously, even in Ponevez, we used to go to the shul and I remember that late father used to spread his tallis over us and we had to stand up practically all the time yomtov...oh he was fine, late father was a fine man

EH

Do you remember any anti Jewish outbursts

JJ

The anti Jewish outbursts that I can remember vividly was once in Vitebsk when the Prince Nicholas came to visit Vitebsk there was a lot of outbursts in the street, there was something said against yiddin, I didn't know, I didn't realise that I had to take my hat off when the procession was going, I got my hat knocked off and I got a good stump by somebody by somebody I don't know who, I was trying to look, vividly I saw the procession pass but I kept I cannot say that I saw the prince. Now there were outbursts, anti Jewish in Ponevez, we came back and there were the take-over bids, also by the Lithuanians, by Whites, by Germans, by Poles and every night there was a different government...there were Lithuanian soldiers with rifles and bayonets stormed our house, they stood around my late father and they said uncomplimentary things about the yiddin, all they wanted was money, gold and watches...the main attraction for them were watches.

and they used to call it "Jeda Rugus" in Lithuanian, I think the only man that possessed a watch at that time in the family was late father. It was a nice golden watch you know with a gold cover and they took that away, they took away everything they wanted that they thought was of some value or attraction and they left. Subsequently we were without a government in Ponevez and two Germans arrived, one machinegun between the two of them and they took over the town and they stayed from the morning till the evening, they had a good feast, and they took the machinegun and went back the same way they came. Now the Lithuanians were busy establishing the take over of power and one day before...Ramagola Street, two horsemen on horseback and two individual people following them with ropes behind the horses, they were two yiddishe people, aged people, which these soldiers picked up in the forest out of town and they came in on that market square in Ponevez and they shot them both dead in front of all the shops around the square, the stones were cobbled, beautifully cobbled, and a Mr. David Shulman very attractive looking man came running out from the shop, they had a liquor business and to the best of my recollection he shot both of these horsemen and he ran back to the shop and I think the same day he made for the Danzig border and he went to Israel where the family were established very, very fine people, there were several brothers, very good looking men and I was told that David Shulman passed away a matter of a few years ago in Israel. There were anti Jewish riots by the Polish students who were trying to molest our girls which we as youngsters, you could even say tough youngster we did not like it, we did not permit it, we used to have scuffles with wood pieces of timber, pieces of iron, we used to fight the Poles, I think on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday, you would call it some sportsground and in winter we used to go skiing on the River Neva, which is a beautiful river, we had problems, the Polish boys would try to molest our girls, but we had always protected our girls. There was once a Saturday night, one of our girls skating and a Polish boy fancied her very much and she did not want to know his troubles and he was a champion skater, he used to skate not on ordinary skates but it was like a knife, like a blade, and he skated past her and he cut through her thigh, right through her dresses and underwear, she was bleeding so profusely that we laid her out and we made some tourniquets and we got her quickly for medical attention, that boy who did it was very well looked after by us boys afterwards ...the Polish crowd were not sympathetic towards us in those days...I don't know in which line you want me to speak about because so many things come to mind

EH

About antisemitism

JJ

We got to school where there was a Russian gymnasium, Polish gymnasium, Lithuanian gymnasium or high school and the Hebrew High School, the yiddishe

school...admittance to the school was by way of IQ, for instance, I was called in and I was asked a few questions of the Chumash...and they told me I go in to Standard 3, I remember two very distinguished financially brothers in South Africa, they came in one of them had a hell of a bad running nose and they asked him the most simple question in the world, and they didnt know, so they put him in second class, I was put in third class

EH

How old were you

JJ

I dont remember but lets try and work it out, we came back after the Revolution in October 1917, this was 1918

EH

You were about eleven

JJ

I was twelve because I had my barmitzvah in the Ponevez yidhiva, in the Junior yishiva

EH

First tell me about your school and then tell me about your barmitzvah

JJ

The school was Hebrew High School and we had teachers came from Austria and Germany and Lithuanian language was a compulsory language, we had a Lithuanian Christian lady teaching us Lithuanian, and we had a teacher for maths was Rabinowitz, and we had a teacher from Austrial a teacher for geography and history, his name was Dr. Rosenfeld

EH

Were all the other subjects taught in Hebrew or in Lithuanian

JJ

Most of it was taught in Hebrew...these were difficult periods as far as I was concerned, I found a lot of interest in skiing, swimming and we had just about formed the Maccabi, athletics, and I think already at that time I started dabbling in soccer for Maccabi, and as boys we used to start smoking a bit on the quiet, we did not have any cigarettes, we used to pick up stompies and smoke them, I remember we used to try and make cigarettes out of matches and try and burn that, and we used to play games like the American baseball, we used to call it laktu, almost very, very similar and being left handed I did very well at that, and naturally I neglected my books and I came home, my first certificate or report, and it was so black, it couldnt be worse, I think I remember I had five twos, they knocked the tripe out of me, I was given hell

EH

Who used to give the punishment

JJ

Mother

everybody used to knock me, so I went back with late mother to school, and the man teacher said you can do it if you want to learn, he says I'll give you a chance to do this paper and in a week's time I'll see if I can push you through to the next class, and I answered every question but having had 4 questions left I battled with the Lithuanian language because we spoke mostly yiddish, Russian ...quite good German and a little bit of Hebrew, Hebrew wasn't bad and I remained for a second year in Standard 3, then the Lithuanian government was already established with a Jewish minister for Jewish Affairs, he was in other words a representative to the what you would call the Parliament in Jewish Affairs, I think his name was Dr. Robinsen, if I remember correctly, I'm open to correction there, and when naturally the Lithuanians started bickering on the Jewish population, they became advanced, more so, we having then already a wonderful Maccabi organisation. This must have been already towards 1920, '21, I think that late Jabotinsky came to Ponevez in 1921 and he addressed Maccabi, which was a beautiful crowd of terrific looking Jewish children and he spoke to us in Russian and when he came in, he turned round and said, *wesabbaki*, you couldn't have heard a pin drop, and he gave a few seconds silence and then he said, do you know why I called you dogs, nobody said a word, he said because you are the vanguard, you are the protection of the broken Jewry after the war, skirmishes, revolutions, and he spoke to us, and since that day I've been a Revisionist all my life.

EH

He made such an impression on you

JJ

Yes, I still am, and I'm a monthly contributor to the Revisionist Party

EH

Tell me about the Maccabi, how was it established

JJ

That was something unreal, the Maccabi Ponevez was the second biggest in Lithuania, I've got photos, I'll show them to you and we had instructors who came from Austria to teach us athletics, gymnastics, and we had events, and we built a soccer field and we had it closed in beautifully and we used to play soccer, we used to play the Lithuanians, the Poles, and all was fought out on hard political religious grounds, do you understand what I mean, it was hard because you knew we were not liked and there was jealousy and I want to tell you that when we used to play Keres, Keres was the Lithuanian Soccer Team in Ponevez, it was like the cup final in England, the commandant and the fire brigade orchestra, would come on the field, walk through town and blow their heads off, and the commandant would come on the field and shake hands with everybody, with all players and the whole stadium was full up...I get goose pimples when I talk about the soccer because there

was a time when I played the second team, I've got photos, I was even once a reserve player for Maccabi Kevne, they used to play in Shavel, Wilkamia were all established Maccabi societies...Maccabi Penevez was nicer than Kevne

EH

Did you also have speakers coming to talk

JJ

Oh yes we had fun, we were naughty boys and girls and one Simchat Torah the yeshivet bechurim had their refreshment and the cakes and they went out of town and they had a party, they ate everything up and they drank the lot and subsequently we were all caught red-handed, the yeshivet bechurim they knocked the hell out of us and they laid charges with the police against us the rev was not good enough, nobody could intervene until this Dr. Robinson I think he was the editor of the Yiddishe Steima in Kevne, the newspaper the daily yiddishe paper came down to hear an arbitration court, some of us had checking wounds, they hammered us, and he managed to arbitrate that they should let us off so they did not take it any further

EH

Did your father help your mother with any jobs in the house

JJ

No, never, because he had to work for a living and there were so many of us children that we gave a helping hand

EH

Did you have regular chores that you had to do

JJ

This is difficult to say, sometimes we were told to do something and we used to do it quite willingly because there was no one else to do it, but mainly these chores fell on our late sisters that are no more, the late Sarah and the late Chaya, they were very useful, we were a big family

EH

Tell me did you have to say grace before and after meals

JJ

Oh yes we used to say before meals and Friday night we used to bench

EH

Tell me a bit about Friday night supper, what did you eat

JJ

Friday night supper, before we carry on with that I must tell you my barmitzvah party. I got barmitzvhed in the Penevez yishova...the rabbi Kahaneva was the chief and I was called up on the bimah, I don't remember what day of the week it was

EH

It wasn't Shabbat

JJ

I dont think so, it could have been but I dont think so...I said my hafterah and I came home and I was given a slice of bread and a big plate of vegetable soup and this was the party of my barmitzvah, this is something I will never forget in my whole life, this is all I got because things were difficult and not everything was available at that time in our lives being under the Lithuanian rule, things were difficult

EH

Was it acceptable to have parties after a barmitzvah

JJ

No there was no party

EH

Yours maybe because they were difficult times

JJ

It was (a) because it was difficult times and (b) because we were a big family and there was no time for celebrations or to make a party

EH

How many times a week did you eat meat

JJ

Meat...we used to eat quite a bit of poultry, kosher meat was very expensive and I would say we would have meat for Friday night, maybe two three times a week perhaps, two times for sure, but Friday night was the meal of the week and we used to say grace, we used to bench after the meal, and my late father used to smoke, but he never smoked on Shabbat, he was the gabay at the Chassidish shul which closed down just before the 1914 war, but all in all I think we were a respectable family because he would not allow anyone to disappear once you were in shul and play in the yard, he wouldnt allow it

EH

Were you allowed to play on Shabbat

JJ

You mustnt forget that we were tough children being brought up in world war I the Revolution, coming back to Lithuania and after you have seen so many atrocities in life, so many killings, so many maimings you became very very hardened, you become hard, and it is difficult to say that we did not play on Shabbat, we would go out Shabbat afternoon, what can you do Shabbat afternoon youngsters with girls, I wouldnt say we did not play on a Shabbat

EH

Tell me did your father have larger helpings than the rest of the family

JJ

No he did not, he was not a big eater, he was very tall, I think he was about six feet tall and he had a lovely little Smuts beard and had beautiful eyes, he was not a man of a lot of talking, he was a very sincere type of a man, I think he was terribly honest

If he would say to a farmer, this is it, it was it...or he will pay him on this and this day for the grain, it was paid, there was no argument, if he did not have the money he would borrow the money and pay

EH

Were you allowed to talk at the table when you were eating

JJ

Well there wasnt much time to talk, the food wasnt too much so you had to eat

EH

What if you left food on the table

JJ

Nobody ever left food, forgot about it

EH

Was your mother an easy person to talk to

JJ

Oh yes she was all right

EH

And your father

JJ

Also

EH

If you had any troubles, to whom would you go

JJ

My troubles were mainly girls, girls, and again girls, sneaker, playing all kind of games, skiing, skating, I was not a popular child in the family because I was naughty, I was so naughty you have no idea, I used to get so many hidings, I used to get locked up so often

EH

How did you feel about it

JJ

Good because I knew I was doing wrong, I knew whatever I did was wrong, I was not punished for nothing

EH

How did your parents expect you to behave towards them

JJ

With obedience, lots of obedience, with respect, with great respect

EH

Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things important in life

JJ

Yes mainly I used to be lectured day and night ...they used to say Yeska we are gibving you the opportunity to study, to learn, and if you dont learn you will grow up an idiot without any education, I knew that was my

they tried but as I said I wasn't interested, as I tell you I had other more important items than learning

EH

Would you say that the ideas of how to behave in life you received from both of your parents or did one play a more important part

JJ

I think mother played a closer part because she was more, I had more to do with her, late father had his job to provide a living...as I told you when I came back with my bad report I went to mother and I got the hell knocked out of me, and then I went to my father and he was most perturbed, he says I don't understand you, I don't understand you, you've got a good brain and you're not using it, so I said I'm sorry I'll try next time, but the next time came and I remained for the second year in Standard 3, and that was the Alpha and the Mega of my education

EH

What age were you when you left school

JJ

I think I must have been round about 16

EH

In the Russian school did you experience any antisemitism

JJ

We were in the Hebrew School, this was all the education I had, the Hebrew School in Class 3, when I failed I remained in Class 3 and therefore I went out to work

EH

Now tell me what type of work did you do

JJ

Well the first work I did was approximately in 1920, I started helping my late brother Kasriel and late father in the produce, the work I used to do was mainly providing grain and selling meal or feed for chickens, I was born in it, I was brought up in produce so you learn it automatically, it becomes your second sense you start knowing the weight and the value of wheat and corn, bran, you learn to know by your fingers, by your eyes, you don't need any machines when you are born in the trade, you pick up a handful of wheat you can say how much the wheat weighs

EH

Did they pay you

JJ

No, I used to get a little bit of pocket money

EH

What did you spend it on

JJ

Pocket money, I used to spend it girls, snooker and smoking a little bit on the quiet, normal boy's entertainment of that age

EH

How long did you work for your brother

JJ

Not for my brother, I worked for my late father, you see when late Kasriel left for South Africa in 1923 I think

EH

Why did he come to South Africa, did you have family there

JJ

No, this is a long story. Actually late Sarah and late Kasriel and I, I think Chaya also, we were all booked to go to America to our family, we had the money sent to us and in 1922, or '24, the Immigration from Lithuania, from Russia to America was stopped, cut off, I don't know if you have that knowledge so there was no alternative, we had to get out

EH

Why

JJ

To earn some money, to bring in some more money ...now we had some relations in South Africa and that was on my late mother's side, very nice family, he is still alive, his name is Mr. Harry Solomon, he was a vice school principal in Benoni, and he helped us with the documentation to enter South Africa so the first one to go was late Kasriel on his own, I don't remember what the fare was but it was a matter of about £12 or £15 was the ticket fromhe had a mishpocha, she was a Mrs. Zippah who was very helpful, and her late husband Abe Zippah, very friendly, very good to us, and after Kasriel left I worked in the shop well...I got a telling off but I inherited the peltz, you know what a peltz is, a kind of a fur coat for winter and the volikes from late Kasriel and I worked the shop was very narrow and very long and we had to bring in bags of 300 lbs weight and put them from low to higher and higher and higher almost to the ceiling, we used to put the bran as it was light, we used to keep the heavy stuff down and everything had to be weighed on a scale, somebody wanted a quarter bag, a half a bag, but we were well known, my late father and mother had a good name and we were very well supported, we used to eke out a living but I cannot remember how much finance because I don't know, I wasn't particularly interested and when I left and Harry took over from me the same job he inherited the same peltz and the volikes...I had photos of this, beautiful photos I tell you they are worth a fortune, I don't know where the hell they are ...Kasriel left for South Africa, he arrived here and Mr. and Mrs. Zippah helped him, took him off the boat and he stayed with them for a short while and then he proceeded to the Transvaal. He got a job somewhere in a Concession store in a place called Mariasberg and he worked for a Mr and Mrs. Kravitz

and I think his commencing salary was £5 a month. From these £5 a month which was all found, board and lodging, he saved all the money and he used to send sometimes the whole £5 back home because they needed it badly, late father was ill, and he got a £1 rise and when he had a little bit more money he sent me a ticket two years later in 1926, we will have to leave my sporting career out for the time being. In 1926 I left via Hamburg in the German Africa line to Cape Town

EH

Tell me about your journey, what were the conditions

JJ

On the ship the conditions were good because we didnt know better, we travelled third class and the passengers were mainly Jewish going to South Africa from all over Lithuania, the assembly was Habag, Hamburg, and I think the food was good

EH

What about the hygienic conditions

JJ

Very good, there was nothing wrong with the boat, the boat was called "Usamara" a German boat, this boat scuttled itself during World War II outside East London, and when I arrived in Cape Town I heard somebody screaming "Joffe, Joffe, Joffe" it was a Mr. Krafchick from Cape Town, he says "Eich ben gecumen arunter nemen fun shif, eich hob far eich paperin and eich vart af eich" (I have come to take you off the ship, and I have ~~ap~~ papers for you) and I didnt know who he was

EH

Did your brother arrange that

JJ

Yes, my brother and subsequently Mr. Krafchick, and my aunt Mrs. Ray Zippah came to see me on the boat

EH

Tell me when you arrived did you have to go through any tests, were the authorities pleasant

JJ

Oh yes, there was no problem, I had a guarantee for South Africa from this cousin, mishpocha of ours from Benoni, Mr. Solomon, that he is my guardian and this affidavit of his guardianship was handed over to the authorities and I had no problem in getting off the boat

EH

Did you have to write a test

JJ

Nothing, I had 2/6d in my pocket

EH

How did you spend your first few days

JJ

My first few days I spent in a boarding house

EH

Where was it

JJ

I think it must have been in the Gardens somewhere or in that area, it wasn't far from town, and I was given a bit of pocket money, I don't remember how much by Mr. Abe Zippah, and a funny incident happened, my God, I'll never forget that, the first Friday I was in the boarding house, and they gave such beautiful fish to eat, I ate whatever they put on my plate, and then I asked for some more fish, I got a kick in my leg, it wasn't nice to ask for second helping, but it was beautiful gefilte fish, I mean I had not had it in years fish like that, although we used to have fish this was terrific, and I met some boys and girls I couldn't speak the language

EH

How did you manage

JJ

I don't remember, I remember we went to the Waldorf Cafe here in Cape Town, we were invited for tea and pastries, and the guy who invited us walked out on us and he left the girl and me to pay, I didn't have the money, the girl I don't remember who she was, she paid but I took a poor view of that other fellow, it was a terrible thing to do, but it happened and I don't remember if I repaid that girl the money, and I stayed with the Zippahs for I think about a week or maybe two weeks, ^{they} ~~xxxx~~ were ~~xxxxxxx~~ busy building a house in Oranjezicht, this is why they stayed in a boarding house, and Kasriel sent me £5 for a railway ticket which was only for 3rd class, and I took out a third class ticket and Abe Zippah gave me a present of a gold pound a gold sovereign I ever had in my life, but I would not change it, I had sandwiches, she gave me and some fruit, and I went into third class, which was at that time only for Blacks, non whites...when the conductor came in he says why are you sitting here, well I said my ticket is third class he says all right you come with me, and he put me in a second class compartment, and I arrived in Germiston about two days later or something travelling through the Karoo, which was miles and miles of nothing, and you get lots of thoughts when you travel through the Karoo and you come from a fertile country like Lithuania or Russia or Poland...I arrived in Germiston and my cousin who is still alive in Johannesburg, he is a retired maths teacher, Mr. Harry Solomon was there to meet me, he was then already a vice principal in some school in Benoni and we took the first train to Benoni to his family, his father and mother had a store in Princes Avenue in Benoni selling furniture, the father was a carpenter by profession and they had

a big family, I think they were four brothers and a sister, and this was October, I spent the month of November there idling, doing nothing, looking for work until someone told me there was a job going in Venreindick at the Bonner Brothers shop; anyhow I went out to Vereindick

EH

Was it a mine

JJ

It was a mine, Venreindick mine, and he had a look at me, he said £3 a month free board and lodging, I said I'll take it because £3 a month was equivalent to 150 lit Lithuanian currency and we needed that money badly, so I started work and my main job was to weigh out leaf tobacco, you know the leaves that the Blacks break up to put in their pipes smoking tobacco, that type of leaf we used to make it a tickey and sixpence wrapped up in paper, and the natives would come in from the mines and buy it by the ton

EH

What about the language problem

JJ

The language I started picking up a little bit, and after the first month I worked there, it was the month of December, the boys from the eating house told me the shop will be closed for three or four days, you know Christmas and Boxing Day and Sunday, so I went to Kasriel, my brother in Mariasberg so I asked Mr. Bonner if I could have two days off, you greener vasser, noch nit on ge varmed de fees und du vilst shoen foren af holidays" (You green water, you have not yet warmed your feet and you already want to go on holidays), I said to him the word bastard I dont like, the boys told me it was an ugly word, I said you must not call me bastard I dont like it, so he says "You bastard" so I said to him Mr. Bonner be careful, I held a two pound weight in my hand, he said "You bloody bastard, you want holidays" I said I'm giving you notice and I let that two)1b fly, and thank God I missed him. I left the shop I went in and I packed my suitcase and I went to take the train to Benoni and I didnt ask for money and I didnt get any money, but he took his cart and he run in to Benoni to the Solomons and he left for me a cheque for £3.6.0d because I worked three days over and above the month £3.6.0d I got and that was my first experience. When the weekend was over the beginning of the following week in January I thought I must get a job and I was already fluent in a few English words, and I wrote out on a piece of paper, and I walked up to the top of Princes Avenue and I went criss-crossed every shop, I said do you need an assistant, have you got a job for me, the things I wrote out in yiddish or in Russian I dont remember but I said it in English, until I walked into a little shop and there was a real talmudistic yid with long hair with a kapotle (long coat) and he says yes I've got a job, I said how much do you pay, I didnt want to know what it is, he said its a big job, its a smeus, can you smeus, I did not know

what the word smous was, I said sure how much do you pay, he said £6 a month all found, I said I'll take it...no, no, £5.10.0, and he said where did you smous, I said I smoused in the Verndick mine...I had to have a job, so he says you come here on Monday morning very early with your things and I'll take you to the station, I will buy you a ticket and you will go to Johannesburg and you will change trains on this and this platform, and you will go to Volverdig, you take the Vilviberg train from Velvedeen to Lichtenburg and my son Itzka will wait for you at the station, in a Tom Mix hat with breeches and leggings, and he is very small but he is your boss Itzka. I arrived in Velveding and I changed trains for Lichtenberg and I was sitting in a compartment and in came a very tall, a beautiful lady and a very short little man and I am sitting, 'I'm not talking anything, and I understood the lady saying to the man in English, he could be Jewish, but what a good looking man, what a good looking child, what a good looking boy and they started talking to me in a very slow English, who I am and where I come from, and where I'm going, so I said I'm going to a place called Vreismeersbildt, and I'm going to work for Mr. N.S. Bobs...he said Oh my God what are you going to do there, and I said I'm going to be a smous, you see I was frightened to ask for the interpretation of the word smous in case I lose the job, so he said are you a smous, I said oh yes, we arrived at Vreismasbildt and with excitement I lost sight of them, the lady evidently went on to Lichtenberg, she was a Mrs. Levy from Pestshefstroom, and the short man was Mr. Bobs, the big boss who I was going to work for, his brother Itska was the manager, he was working for the man that was with me in the train so Izka was on the station and he had a couple of Black boys with him to take my suitcases and we walked across to the ~~xxxxxx~~ house, a shop and a butchery. And they told me this is your bed and this is the fellow that is working here I think his name was Salke, and this is Mr. Harry Craig who is a cattle buyer a cattle dealer and then I unpacked a little bit and I came out on a veranda which was on the main road, out comes Mr. Bobs the Boss, and he says to me Joffe I'm the boss and Itzka is the manager, the smous whose place I'm going to take will only arrive on Thursday, he says in the meanwhile you can help in the shop, and in the butchery and in the kitchen...he said can you cook, I said who cant cook, he said what can you make, I said I can make fricadels so I went into the butchery and the butcher gave me mince and I used to fry fricadels for an army, they were damn good, with onion and egg and a little bit of flour, they were hot, real good...I am introduced to everybody as the smous, the hawker in English, but I had sleepless nights not knowing what the hell I'm in for. Thursday afternoon, you heard the clatter of horses hooves and the rattle of a wagon, and Itzka says Oh there is your smous coming. It was a pair of mules with a wagon, a Black boy was sitting there he was driving it and an elderly gentleman on a wagon, and he came down, I dont remember his name and he shook hands with me and he said you are the smous I said yes

and they started taking off boxes with little bits of weighed out groceries like coffee packets and tea packets and sugar and candles and matches and all these things and a little bit of clothing and then came off a lot of eggs and chickens and turkeys, you know things which you trade in normally, and he said thats it, I thought God Father this is a piece of cake to the work I used to do, to sit on top of a wagon and to ride, they showed me how to check out, that you must give an account ...you see when you go out you are booked out with so many items to the value of so much, when you come back you've got to account for it in cash and trade in, like skins and hides, dry ones, wet ones...I dont remember the prices but I think eggs were about a tickey or fourpence a dozen, fowls were about sixpence, and skins were for nothing, but you used to trade in with the Blacks on the location or where they used to work on the diamond diggings ,,...its a beautiful little place, its on the Mooi River, beautiful...and naturally Monday morning I had to go out so everything was packed in the boxes and put on the wagon, Thank God I had the same boy that the old man used to have so he helped me all the time you see the money I already understood, the tickey, a shilling, ten bob, a pound and so on, and I knew that I was responsible for the goods, I did business with the Blacks, mainly Blacks and then I started on whites, and when I increased the business, he increased my salary to £6 and then £7 from £5.10.0 I would send £5 home every month and ten shillings I used to keep, I had everything free and I started playing tennis a little bit

EH

Where did you live

JJ

I lived in the house but I used to go out for two, three days at a time, and while I was out a few times I slept under the wagon too, a bit of antisemitism but some farmers wouldnt let you in, it was not a political issue, but it was a dirty issue why they would not let me in...he told me subsequently after we became such big friends that he went in once to a big firm in Potschefstroom to buy a span of oxen and a wagon and he undertook to pay after the harvest and he signed a bill for is, and they had a look at the signature, and said it is not a good signature, they threw the paper behind the counter and they made him sign another one, and he insisted that he paid twice for that span of oxen and the wagon, and he didnt want to know my troubles, I went back to him, he was an elderly man, had a very wealthy family, from him and his sons and the Blacks that worked for him, I could make a living comfortably, and I said look what happened with you and the other people is not my problem, why should I suffer, and he said you are quite right, carry on doing business and I used to sleep there too, but one day he used to call me You, he couldnt say Joe he said you come here tomorrow or next week, then we will go together to Potchefstroom in my cart and horses, he is going to make out a Will, a Testament, to attorneys, Low and Nell, in Potchefstroom and he made out the

and he made out the Will and I signed as a witness, and after I signed as a witness, I did not know what I was signing we came out and he gave me a couple of sovereigns, gold, and he took me back and I carried on my work he was such a fine man that when late father was very, very ill and we got an SOS to send money, I borrowed from him twentyfive pounds, in sovereigns, and I went to the post office and I sent it off in relays, every day or every week, the twentyfive pounds went home because late father had to go to Germany for medical attention...I repaid every cent to the old man with great, great, gratitude. This was the first time in my life I ever borrowed money, and subsequently I borrowed some money from Harry, but I never borrowed money from anybody but it was a life, I became very well liked by the Afrikaaners

EH

You picked up the language

KK

Oh yes

EH

Afrikaans

JJ

Oh yes, I used to go to Potchefstroom by lift and I met yiddishe girls, and I was naughty, hell I was naughty, but they all liked me

EH

How did you meet them

JJ

My boss used to live in Potchefstroom, and I would go there for a weekend and I had lots of girls, beautiful girls, and we used to dance a lot and sing a lot, I picked up the language as fast as a human being could

EH

Did you pick up first Afrikaans or English

JJ

There was a teacher of the school in Reichenberg a Mr. Keat, who gave me a few lessons in English, he charged me 3d, nothing practically, I think I must have had about six or eight lessons perhaps or ten lessons, and then I met a gentleman who drove a beautiful little Renault car, it looked like a little tank, he came into the shop, he said to me Joffe I want you to meet my daughter ...beautiful, lovely, lovely girl, goodbye, he went off, he came round again and said Joffe I want to talk to you, he says I want you to marry my daughter...I'll give you the farm, I'll give you cattle, I'll give you money, I'll give you everything...you know this was the first confrontation in my life that I had such a thing happen to me, that I needed stability, that I needed help goes beyond thinking...I don't know where I got it from that I was a superguy that I did not want a "gereter shidduch" (Matchmaking)

this put me off, If he did not say marry his daughter, most probably I would have loved her, it did not make much difference to me, she was a lovely, healthy girl, I felt that I did not want a "gereter shidduch" (matchmaking) I said no, naturally I thought I made a mistake all my life, who know what would have happened, who can tell, the girls in Potchefstroom told me that I was getting too fat, I was putting on ~~wix~~ wieght, so I went to my boss, I said I heard that there were so many jobs offered on the mines, on the Reef in Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, I said I think I want to leave your work. He says I wouldnt like you to do it, I'll give you more money, I said the girls say I look like a pumpoon...I heard they were paying £15, £12 for an assistant in a shop £17 on the mines for a salesman and I qualified myself as a salesman so I gave him notice, they were very good to me, very very good, and I came to Johannesburg...I stayed with a cousin of ours, a second cousin of ours, the one from Ponevel, Oscar Sacks, and I started walking about, talking to the boys, I was told there was a job in Nigel, I took the train out there, Geduld Extension and I walked from Springs or Brakpan, I dont remember to Geduld Extension to the Concession store, and when I arrived I said are you looking for a salesman, he said yes, take off your jacket and get behind the counter today is payday...amongst the Blacks it was payday, and I accredited myself, he said you are all right, and I said how much do you pay, he said £5 a month I nearly dropped, I took my jacket and walked back to the station, I dont know how many miles I walked and I took the train and I came back to Johannesburg late, then I heard that there was a job going in Bram^afontein, I went out to Bramfontein for the job, yes, oh yes, get in behind the counter I want to see what sort of man you are, I got in I packed up the trousers nicely, the shirts nicely, I already had a knack of doing it, and he says yes I'll give you twelve pounds a month but I've got to share the accommodation with him there was just a room at the back of the shop...I did not like his method of instruction, that when a Black man comes from the mine and he buys something you must give him irregular change...I said thank you and I took my jacket and I walked, he chased me and he said what is the matter with you, he said I want to talk to you come back, I came back and I said you know that is a hell of a thing to do, I felt it is not an honourable thing to do, so he looked at me and he says you are a very, very good man. I know you, I even know your family...I said you know my family, he says yes I do, and I worked for him for I think eight months or nine months and he paid me £17 already not £12 and he wanted me to stay but I wasnt very happy in that job with that first episode that happened between him and me. He tried everything in the world to keep me, so I came back and I had this Mrs. Sacks was a wonderful, wonderful person to me...I said I'll go to the diggings because Kasriel my elder brother was already on the diggings, I came to the diggings and I was looking for a job and I got a job from a Mr. Levy, the Blacks used to call him "Mamenomen" (Fat man) he was very corpulent, and I worked there for

a while on the diggings in the shop and then I was made a proposition to build a bakery, his name was Snake Sipolitsky and without any money investment I just had to work so I cannot remember the financial position of the bakery, I think I used to earn better than in the shops, but it was the hours that were killing, you had to be up about two, three in the morning with the bread, with the boys,

EH

Did they teach you how to bake

JJ

I did not bake, I used to be selling the bread, we had a horse and cart, we used to bake bread puddings, a big loaf of bread which you could divide into ten or twelve tickey lines or sixpenny lines, you used to just break and we used to sell it to the shops, go around to all the diggings and come back in the afternoon, but in the afternoon you had to go to Lichtenberg to fetch flour, and I think we were the first firm to buy a four cylinder truck, and there were a lot of nice yiddishe boys there, a lot and in the bakery we made a kind of a eating place for all the bachelors...they had to pay in a pool and we would buy the meat from late Perlman the butcher and Lasky was also a member of the gang and we used to take at least twelve pounds lamb chops or mutton chops, put it in the pudding pans in the bakers oven, in the bakery and we used to fry it, bake it, and we always had plenty of Matels brandy, we drank only Matels brandy

EH

Tell me all the Jewish boys were they working in the shops of the diggings

JJ

Some were digging, quite a few were digging, some had their own businesses a lot of bachelors, some of them had wives...we used to take the lorry, we used to load up hides, wet hides from the butchers store or empty petrol drums and take it into Lichtenburg and bring back a load of flour for the bakery, and one day I passed by, I think it was somewhere in Rustenberg and the husband came up and he said Joe, he was a client, do me a favour take my wife into Lichtenberg, she has got to catch the train to Johannesburg, I said sure, and I picked up that lady and we were travelling towards Lichtenberg and the steering wheel broke loose and she told me that she was pregnant, got off the lorry and I had a look, the rod was broken so what could I do, I took off the belt from my pants and I got underneath the lorry and I tied up somehow the steering wheel and we managed to crawl in to Lichtenberg...there in Lichtenberg I saw a Mr. Morris Kruger, they had a mill, charming fellow had a little two seater Ford and I said Morris I'm in trouble, here is the lady and I've got to take her to the train and the train is gone or is leaving he said dont worry I'll take her to Coleen and she will take the train in Colleen, so he took the lady in his car, he took her to Colleene and her time

was exposed, and the story goes that he took her to his house and she gave birth to a son in the passage of his house...this son that was born is today one of the biggest men in South Africa in property business, one of the biggest men in Johannesburg, one of the biggest in the country...I don't know him I've not met him, but I see so much about him in the press

EH

So you used to buy the flour and take it to the bakery

JJ

Take it back to the bakery and bake bread...until I joined the family

EH

You mean your brothers

JJ

Yes my brother my late brother Kasriel and my ex brother-in-law, we brought them out from Russia, my late sister and her husband we brought out, Kasriel and I we brought them out, then all of us brought out Harry and late mother just like this, a chain reaction...and subsequently I took charge of a shop and a butchery on a place called Hendricksdull, it belonged to African European Investment Company, Lewis & Marks, an old yiddishe firm, and we had a concession from them; so we started selling Shell and Vacuum paraffin grease and I used to buy meat from some wholesale butcher in Lichtenburg or Graffontein

EH

Sorry did you save up enough money to buy this concession store

JJ

You didn't need money, I was working in it, we were given a little bit of credit by a firm called Rosenberg Wholesalers and we were given some credit of petrol and paraffin, we used to pay from day to day and I used to manage the shop and the butchery with the help of one or two black boys...we had very interesting neighbours, the Dorf Brothers from Klerksdorp, there was late Louis and his brother, I think he passed away now in Johannesburg, I've forgotten his name, he gave himself a kind of an English name you know, nice boys, they became very wealthy, very big farmers, very big storekeepers, there were lots of boys, there were some landsleit on the diggings too, the Lurie Brothers, Dattners, Sklars, there were lots of yidden there

EH

Did you work such long hours there too

JJ

Oh yes, I mean you worked from sunrise to sunset, what else can you do

EH

There was not much social life

JJ

No, the only social life you had was to go into Lichtenburg to look for a girl to go to a cinema, and there were regular Church services on a Sunday night by the N.G. Kerk, I used to go and listen very very often, yes I used to go and

listen to sermons, naturally when the prayers were on, I knew the time, I would go and listen to the sermons, a sermon has never done anybody any harm, sermons are always good, disregarding the language, I was on Hendricksdal, Harry was on another farm, and late Kasriel and Sarah and my ex brother-in-law were also on another farm, we had three shops and a butchery...my late sister and Kasriel they had a shop and a fruit shop to keep it open at night because there was not nothing else to do...subsequently Harry couldn't take the life and he disappeared he ran away, he went to work for Hechter and Davidovitz, I don't remember where it was, and the catastrophe came when the diamond prices went to blazes, a carat or diamond, they used to pay £2 or £3 a carat, they started paying £1 and chips, the little ones, very small diamonds were ten shillings a carat, so naturally business dropped. Diggers who you used to give credit to couldn't afford to pay, and you had to pay your creditors, so we couldn't pay, found it difficult...the family had a meeting and they decided to pay everybody...we took all the goods, the stock that we had and we took it round to shops on the diggings, and we sold stock for as low as five shillings in the pound, two and sixpence in the pounds just to pay everybody, we paid everybody. One interesting thing this was between the oil companies to whom we owed most of the money, everybody got paid every cent, and in 1931 we had no alternative than to leave the diggings...we sold out everything just for nothing, we gave it away and we came to Pretoria. In Pretoria we had a relation, family by the name of Shapiro

EH

Is that why you went to Pretoria, because you had relations

JJ

I remember the arrival in Pretoria, all of us, Harry was gone, late Kasriel and late Sarah, my ex brother-in-law and myself, so somehow or other it became known to us that a good place to make a living was Lady Selborne location. We went out and we saw a stand, I think Mrs. Shapiro must have helped us a great deal and we bought that stand and we went into Pretoria and we went to see a moneylender and he said he would lend us some money and it took in no time we put up a house and shop and a butchery

EH

In the location

JJ

In the location, Lady Selborne Location, and we all worked, we were supposed to be in partnership, the licences were in my name...now they used to buy the meat from the cold storage, little by little, they were very cautious in giving credit. One day I went into town and I asked them haven't they got a job for me. The man I spoke to was the late Mr. Max Jaffe, not Joffe, he was a red haired, ginger face, he was the sales manager of the cold storage. He said Joffe we are firing people, we don't hire people, times are bad. I realised that I've got to get out because there wasn't enough for all of us to do

so one day he came out to the location, he said Mr. Joffe I've got a job for you. Come in tomorrow. I rode a bicycle from Lady Selbourne Location to town, and he says to me, look there is an insolvent butchery, it is an Indian butchery, he owes us money and I'll give you a job as a bicycle delivery boy ...after I tried this job, it was some painstaking business, I had to ride the bicycle from (inaudible) to Sunnyside Street in Pretoria. I had a basket containing about 80 or 90 or more pounds of meat, various orders, and this was a daily procedure until the Indian reinstated himself in the butchery for a short period and I was given notice. The first packet I received as salary was for several days at the rate of £2 a week. I remember getting it from the paymaster who was a Mr. van der Skyve, he was an unfortunate man to have one leg and he walked on crutches, my pay was something a pound and a few pence, so I had to get a job...I went to the big boss and I told him I must have work, so he told me that they have a butchery in Pretoria West, and I must start on Monday. I started the butchery, it was mainly European order trade and I was not up to the standard of city blockmen, so I made a few phow paxs in the butchery until we took stock and there was a gross loss of a few pounds. I was called to the office and he said Mr. Joffe are you also stealing my money. I said No Sir I'm not, but I am a little bit generous with your meat to try and get clientele, I said, but if you will have patience for another two three weeks you will find it in order. He said, good, and funnily enough in three weeks time I started showing a profit in the butchery I was duly promoted to the biggest butchery at that time belonging to the company which was showing heavy losses, and I fixed that up, and I was subsequently made manager of the retail butcheries, and from thereon I became a traveller, and after being a traveller for perishable products I became an assistant service manager to Mr. Max Jaffe who originally gave me the first job. I have learned a great deal of practical and practical experience and theoretical experience from my boss Mr. Ivan Ventzle, who I think was a real commercial genius in South Africa but so few people know about him...he was unreal, very rigid, very hard but a brilliant mathematician, economist and financier, subsequently I have worked with Mr. Ventzle and I resigned and I tried something else but it wouldn't work until Mr. Jaffe came to me from Bloemfontein where he was manager, and he told me Mr. Davies wants me back anywhere as long as I'm back with the trust. Now Port Elizabeth branch was open for a manager so it was the decision of Mr. Max Jaffe, he goes to Port Elizabeth, I become manager in Bloemfontein, or he stays in Bloemfontein and I go to Port Elizabeth. In turn I met a young lady in Bloemfontein, a very lovely Jewish girl and it was a bit of a love story and I wanted to marry her and her father said that my salary wasn't enough for her chocolate bill a month, the only way I could marry his daughter would be if I had my own business

I resigned my job and I went to Vryburg where I was made a proposition by a very prominent Jewish gentleman who subsequently did not keep his word to the arrangements we had made

EH

How did you come to know of it, did you have any contacts

JJ

Vryburg, I had my younger brother Harry and he was the agent, the go-between the man and myself ...I was terribly upset because we got married and it didn't pan out the way we wanted it to so I decided after twelve months to try my own luck in business, starting from zero with a loan of £192 from a lady, a non Jewish lady, and I hired a shop for £8 a month and I bought up about £25 of stock in second hand furniture, a few mattresses, a few chairs

EH

Did you know anything about furniture

JJ

Nothing

EH

So how did you come to do furniture

JJ

Because the girl, my ex-wife's family were in the business and I had friends in the furniture business and it was about the easiest thing to go in with the minimum capital, for everything else you needed cash, so we had a drinking session with the manager of the Standard Bank and he told me lad if you need money you come to me, so I came to him, he didn't deny that I could have all I want but I said I want £300 overdraft, he said on what, I said on nothing, he said you can't have it so there was a hell of a palaver, he said he will give me £200, I said no I want £300, so he says why £300, I said I've got to go to Johannesburg I've got to buy furniture, second hand furniture from sales, I said I've got to transport it to Johannesburg station, I've got to rail it, I've got to pay railage in Vryburg and I've got to have a little bit over for liquidity, he said he will give me £250, I said no...he gave me £300, how he did it, I think at that time the maximum he was allowed to give was £500... however it was the beginning, I started the business on 12th January 1938 and at the end of June I showed a profit of £512 ...I had a bookkeeper used to charge me £5 a month, the late Mr. Jack Cohen, he didn't believe the story but he came up, he says you know something personally I think you are bankrupt and I'm not charging you for this month's work but get yourself somebody else I'm not doing the work any more, it's impossible that you should make yourself £512 profit, however, I found bigger premises and I moved over and started progressing, then the war broke out and I joined the Kimberley Regiment ... I had a wonderful lady working for me, her name was Mrs. Granding and I had an Afrikaans man working, his name was France Veed, however, after joining

the Kimberley Regiment I went to Johannesburg...I got a bit of stock, second hand furniture, new furniture ...so I did not know what my fate was going to be, so I decided to make out a Will in favour of my late mother and I could only do so by coming back and offering the man Mr. Veed...she should inherit whatever there is, I said Mr. Veed I'm offering you a full partnership in the business without having to invest a cent and you and Mrs. Grant will run the business, he said I've got news for you to, I'm giving you notice on the turn..with the same view in the event of anything happening my mother would be sole beneficiary and she can do what she likes, give it to the children in Israel and so on, so I went to Sonderwater, I was boarded as a C3 soldier and I had five operations, mainly on the head and sinusitis in Johannesburg, and they said either I do clerical work or I have my discharge, so I got my discharge and I came back to Vryburg, and naturally there were bad days, and I started concentrating on farming and farming and cattle and business, I worked very, very hard and thank God I was very successful, starting from nothing, I wasn't used to big money but I did make good, we lived very well, very comfortably and it was a good life

EH

Right now I know about your work. Now I want to ask you a few questions about religion. You lived mostly in Vryburg, did you belong to a shul

JJ

In Vryburg, we all belonged to the Liberal Congregation. I was on the Committee we were one of the most prosperous, closely integrated Jewish communities in South Africa, we were high up in contributions, we used to go out for collection we had lots of collections in various ways, we used to appeal to farmers, non Jewish farmers, to assist us, they gave us cattle, livestock which was sold on the stock fairs in favour of our congregation, and when it was the IUA fund, we used to collect non Jewish farmers as well as Jewish...we had lots of Jewish farmers who were married to ladies of other faiths, and they gave very liberally and we had a wonderful congregation and when I lived there there were about 36 to 38 families, we imported a rev from Israel and his wife and he was under contract to us for about 3 or 5 years

EH

What was his name

JJ

(Unintelligible)

EH

Does not matter, was there a shul already established

JJ

There was a shul and a hall...Rabbi Slonim, when I arrived he came from Israel he came from a wonderful religious family in Jerusalem...his wife had a sister and his wife's sister married Morry Walter, and Rabbi Slonim was the essence of a most wonderful, wonderful human being, he was not the money grabber

money meant nothing to him, like a real proper Israeli chalutz, money was nothing, brandy was more important, and he and I were the main workers at the Chevra Kadisha in Vryburg. My younger brother was President of the Chevra Kadisha, I was vice-president, and we had to do all the work ourselves, it was not very often but you know from the district there were a few yidden, and we had to do all the work ourselves willingly knowing that its a mitzvah and we did it well.

EH

How many Jewish families were there at that time

JJ

About 38 families

EH

Were they all religious

JJ

Well they had ...they were all good yidden, they all meant well, if they did not come to shul we knew that Saturday was impossible to come to shul because everyone was in business, but Friday nights we had a wonderful minyan and for a number of years I used to daven erev Shabbat, Mincha and Ma'ariv, then we got Rabbi Slonim, he passed away, that was a big tragedy in our lives in Johannesburg and I was very, very sorry about it because he wrote to me one letter, I went to see him in General Hospital, he wrote to me again and I was a little bit slow in coming, I couldnt make it and he passed away. Then we imported a rabbi from Israel with the name of Yeshou Kimmelman, he was about 21 and his wife Saba was about 17 and he made fantastic progress with the Congregation and particularly with the children. We were very, very happy with him. We gave him a house, we built a house and he lived happily until the Potchefstroom congregation decided to take him away from us, so there is some old stupid Shulchan Orach Law, where it comes from I dont know, they would not come to talk to him in Bryburg but they asked him to meet them on the Veringeen road...there was a Mr. Shulman from Potchefstroom who came to negotiate, and when Rabbi Kimmelman, came to tellus that he was being offered an enormous salary in Potchefstroom, we felt we did not want to stay in his way and he went. Since that day we have been struggling...within a matter of a few months he made a choir for the children, and I want to tell you it was the pleasure of the week to go on Friday night to shul and to listen to him daven, he had a lovely voice, and the children...subsequently I decided that the children should take over the service on Friday night, which was done. Every child in turn used to daven maariv on Friday night, and the attendance was always good...and yontevim we had such a wonderful congregation, it was out of this world...we have over 100 people for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and we had a rabbi, we had unpleasantness with rabbonim...some were good, some were not good at all and some did stupid things and we had to buy out their contracts

to get them out of Vryburg, they were not good enough for us, but we managed to struggle on and on and the community started to disperse, children grew up, matriculated, higher education, families followed...we had every Sunday night we had a game of cards, all the proceeds would go to the congregation or some benefit cause, we had markets we had once a year open markets, we had dances organised, we had to fight for it to have the cafe at the stockfairs in Vryburg and the Jewish ladies food was very very popular amongst the cattle buyers and sellers and particularly all the Blacks working there, they could not wait for a Jewish ladies Friday sale because they would get twice as much in weight for value for tw half the price in money, it was good and good until such time as the community became smaller and smaller and smaller and we could not keep up a rev any more so Max Cohen, my brother Harry used to daven musaf and crea and I used to daven Shachrit Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur...it was good until we had to follow the children and we were leaving Vryburg, naturally very much upset about it, and the congregation had been informed that there was an amount of money left for a specific purpose by a South African Jewish Springbok rugby player...Fred Smollen or Mr. Smollen I dont remember ...he was a famous rugby personality in South Africa, and I think he left £5000

EH

Did he live in Vryburg

JJ

Yes he left it for a specific purpose, only for a shul to be built, but nothing else, just for a shul, unfortunately we had a beautiful hall cum shul we had built a beautiful oren kodesh and I managed to get the man that worked for me, Mr. Veet to carve the Oren Kodesh, made a beautiful job of it and we could not get the £5000 because it was left solely with the idea of having the shul, so my committee members went to the Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg and to the best of my knowledge Advocate Maisels was approached on the subject and he managed to negotiate with the Master of the Supreme Court that we should get the interest which would help the congregation which I believe was agreed (end of tape) and I promised faithfully I would come to their son Brad's barmitzvah...I want to tell you I travelled to Kimberley I flew to Kimberley specially to attend the barmitzvah, there were only five four families left...the shul cum hall is kept in beautiful condition but services are not held any more, they have got no minyan...only during the holidays when a few visitors come and the children come that they might have occasionally a minyan...now the rabbi Cooperman from Kimberley came to officiate the barmitzvah, it was such an eye opener to me, from all over we were approximately twenty five or thirty yidden altogether and there were about 200 non Jewish people. The shul was crowded, there were no seats left only standing room and he translated the entire service from Shachrit till

the end of the barmitzvah, he is an Irish Jew he comes from Salisbury, a very very fine rabbi, charming man, and I want to tell you that will shake you, that it was all kosher, everything was kosher, it is just unbelievable, he insisted on kosher...I don't know the cost to this barmitzvah, but Isaac had to send a lorry to Johannesburg to bring a tent a marquee, they brought the marquee, they put it up, he hired furniture and Boyke Rollef did all the decorations, electric lights were put in, the food was so fantastic, I can not single out the best hotel in Johannesburg or Cape Town who could supercede the catering of that day, nobody, impossible, I have never seen such luxury foods presented, there was no shortage of refreshments neither, plenty of everything, and the boy did very well...I was honoured, I was given an aliya, the only one, the Cohen, the Levy and the Israel in the morning and the boy, I was astonished that the boy read fluently from the Torah, he read it beautifully...it was fantastic to see how four families can keep up a congregation...what they do now is they have amalgamated with Mafeking, and in Mafeking they have got this wonderful man Jack Fish, so they all go for yomtov, for Rosh Hashana Yom Kippur they go to Mafeking and Mafeking has got more families than Vryburg and they've got a lot of Israelis working for Baputhatswana government, whom I don't know, I've never met them, so they had a big minyan and Mr. Jack Fish puts them all up for free for yomtov, food, hotel, drinks, everything on the house, he is an unreal man, to live, to meet and to know...I cannot talk highly enough Jewish life goes on, Harold Schechter is carrying the lot, Esme Ralph is number two, you know Esme was converted

EH

So most of the Jews who remained in Vryburg are married to gentile women

JJ

Yes, they became all converted, and I want to tell you I am very, very, very proud of them. Now I want to tell you while we are on the subject of Esme that this I think should be on record, Esme Ralph was I think a girl called Potgeiter, a lovely kid. When she married, she went for her lessons in Johannesburg or Kimberley, I don't remember, she became proficient in Hebrew that she taught four boys the entire barmitzvah in Hebrew, and I want to tell you Eve that there were no flaws, and this Esme Ralph should be really commended on such a performance to teach Jewish children the entire ceremony of the barmitzvah without skimping a word. Now this is something in all my life I've never heard and I've never seen and I don't think there will be another one and what she is not doing today...Julie had a leg amputated, she works all day in the shop, she has got three lovely boys, they are Springbok hockey players, they play for Northern or Southern Transvaal, one is in the army, one is an auditor, David is a champion boy. I have not seen them for so many years, I don't know what they look like, but Esme Ralph I would class her as one of the most outstanding personalities in the Jewish annals of our history. She is the greatest, and she just takes it as it comes. She keeps the keys of the shul

shul, she keeps the keys of the Oren Kodesh, she cleans it, she looks after it, so does Marie, they all do their share, and not forgetting Harold's wife what's her name, Zelda, Zelda also helps, they all help, but the meeting is still there of the community, the togetherness is still there and I think they are to be admired. I love them, that's all I can tell you.

EH

Tell me how much would you say religion meant to you as a child

JJ

To me as a child, well, religion meant everything because I was brought up in it, I was born in it, we were a fairly religious kosher family and I still remember the years when I used to daven every morning with Tfillin and so on, and gradually you get out of it when you become assimilated to a foreign life like in South Africa, you know gradually you move out, you get out of it, but even in my naughty years when I was wild, I was still always thinking of my yeshiva days, those few years, the little while I was there, or the cheder and I loved Israel all my life, I've been a Revisionist all my life

EH

Now I want to know about Zionist views, was your family involved in Zionism

JJ

To the best of my recollection, I cannot tell you because

EH

What about your parents

JJ

I'm trying to tell you, my parents that we were so much occupied in making a living, we had no capital, when they left Lithuania they had nothing, we worked up and lost a lot of money in Russia, when we had money it used to run into hundreds of millions so when we left Russia to go back to Lithuania there was nothing that we could take along because it was overnight we run away, so we left everything, so then we came to Ponevez we had to start struggling to make a living, if it wasn't for the cow that we got back from Pampian, we would have starved, but this is the time when we started a little business, so I cannot tell you about Zionism appertaining to my parents because I don't remember...but I joined Maccabi in Ponevez, I was one of the first few, I've got beautiful photographs of Maccabi, and when Jabotinsky came in 1921 I became an ardent follower of Jabotinsky, and I've been a Revisionist ever since and till a few years ago I was on the executive committee of the Western Province Revisionist Society, occasionally I still am, when they need me

EH

What were your activities in Maccabi in Lithuania

JJ

Well it was mainly sport and faithfulness to Zionism, because Maccabi is a division of Zionism

EH

Did you have any speakers or discussions

JJ

Oh yes, we had a lot of people used to come and lecture to us on Zionism, from Kovno, from Shavel, from Velkamier, from Germany, from Austria, oh we had lots of that, but Maccabi stood for one thing, towards a Zionist movement all the years

EH

And when you came to South Africa, did you belong to any Zionist organisation

JJ

When I came to South Africa, there wasn't very much time, when you live out of a city and you've got to work day and night and you don't know the language, it wasn't easy. When I came into Johannesburg naturally I immediately looked for yiddishkeit, I went to the Jewish Guild in Johannesburg and I participated there for a while in everything that was going, everything that was offered

EH

Do you remember any fund-raising campaigns, any speakers that came to South Africa or in Vryburg....any famous people that came for Keren Hayesod

JJ

Yes there were quite a few used to come from Johannesburg

EH

Can you remember any names

JJ

I remember Jabotinsky coming to South Africa

EH

Where did you hear him

JJ

I think it was in Johannesburg in a very big cinema

EH

Was it well attended

JJ

Oh it was crowded...he was one of the finest speakers in the world, then there was a fellow, Dr. Alexander Rosenfield who became subsequently a Maccabi PTO for the Rothschilds, Rothschild used to I believe pay his expenses and he used to travel world-wide for Maccabi and Zionism, but I think everybody who was a big man in Johannesburg in Zionism, I don't remember their names offhand used to come to Vryburg to lecture us, everybody....Rabbonim used to come, Rabbi Duschensky used to come to us

EH

Do you remember any anti Zionists protests

JJ

Anti Zionists protests

Well these were during the beginning of the war, there were some anti Zionist protests, the Zionists were always classed together with Freemasons, always anti Zionists and anti Freemasonry...newspapers exhibitions, there were a few confrontations I believe in Johannesburg or in Cape Town but I don't think it was on a big scale to the best of my memory. We had a few problems during the beginning of the war in anti Jewishness emanating from radio, always the Juden, and the Juden, and the Juden. Now here I must tell you a story that one day a farmer came into my business and he said look here I want to buy a radio from you and on one condition that I can hear what Hitler says about the yidden from Shishon...I'll sell you a radio but what Hitler says is not my business he took out the radio and he brought it back the following day and he said the damn thing is no good...I said what's the matter with it, he said he can't get Shishon on it, I said have a look, he never switched it on, he never switched it on so he couldn't hear, but he says are you a Jew, I said yes I'm a Jew he says why does Hitler hate you, he says you are a good boy, you are a good South African, I said I'll leave this to your better judgement...he was a fine old man and he came back to me a few months later, he's very sorry, he's met so many good people and he does not want a Shishon radio...his name was Mr. Joshua Housebrooke, the grandfather of the family Housebrookes in Florida. It's an interesting episode.

EH

Now they say at that time there were not very many Jewish women in South Africa was it a problem for a young man

JJ

Oh yes...the problem of Jewish women of marriageable type of a woman was a, it wasn't a problem for the South African born boy, but it certainly was a problem for us Lithuanians, a, we didn't know the language sufficiently well b, we were not educated, I had no education at all, ~~just~~ only one year, and the pronounced dialect of mine in English is unirradicable, I mean I did not learn English to know better

EH

Was it a problem

JJ

Yes it was a problem because you are always looked down upon, a greener

EH

So you wouldn't be accepted in society

JJ

But I want to tell you that a lot of us, I think most of us, made good there were cases which were really pathetic, now there was one thing that happened to me, I had a schoolmate of mine in Ponevez we used to sleep and drink together in one bed, and he went to South Africa, I came to South Africa, and he became a wealthy man in East London and I couldn't wait to see him when I came to South Africa...when I came to East London I was on sick

leave from the army in uniform, naturally when we met it was something... brotherly love ...he did not know what to do for me, he offered me a car a driver, petrol, coupons, everything, and he said Friday night you are coming to my house...I'll come and fetch you at the hotel and we will have a real celebration. I was in the hotel having a few drinks with Harold Schechter late father, it was his hotel, I think it was called Cumberland, we had another drink, we had a third drink, we had a fourth drink...nobody comes to fetch me suddenly he arrives and he is crying...I said Vannie why are you crying, what happened, whats wrong...I'm sorry to have to tell you that my wife does not want to entertain you, you are a Russian yid, you know I never met his wife, she is a lady whoever she is, I nearly dropped, it took him hours to go home he did not want to go home but he went home and I never visited his house, thats a fact to give you an idea on the question you just asked about greener...an isolated case that happened to me in my life...you know thank God I never took his car, I never took his petrol, but I visited his office on quite a few occasions until I had to leave East London...would you believe that, she did not want to entertain a Russian boy, a Russian Jew ...that is something to think about, it can happen, it happened

EH

Tell me did Jewish males spend time with gentile girls

JJ

Oh yes of course, we ate with them, we slept with them, I' mean you have got to live a natural life

EH

What about Coloured girls

JJ

There was no necessity, I mean if I lived in Cape Town I would not know the difference between a Coloured girl or a European girl, I see some of them I cant tell the difference today, so what difference would it have made in those days...I wasnt a bad looking specimen of humanity, I played all kinds of games I was almost versatile excepting in academics ...I could ride a horse as good as anybody else, I could play soccer, I could swim, I played golf, I played tennis, I was accepted, only with the greatest respect in life without any regrets

EH

Do you remember many Jews marrying out of faith

JJ

Yes of yes

EH

Was it frowned upon, was it accepted

JJ

Look you see the thing is this, it becomes a cantankerous disease intermarriage take a fellow like late Morris Grace, you heard of him, Morris Grace came to

He started off like I did, he was a smous and the family Potgeiters befriended him, they gave him a bed to sleep in, they helped him in business, they helped him to get along, there were two or three sisters, there was Ella and Susie ...lovely girls, Ella was a charming lady whom he subsequently married, and he had no alternative, it became a matter of companionship, he had less education than I think I did, so what do you expect, why not, rather live a normal life and marry a Christian woman ...what Yiddishe girl would like to go and live with a smous in Kutcherdan...could you name one, you couldn't, nor could anybody else

EH

Tell me did you ever hear of a case the parents sat shiva

JJ

Yes I heard something like that on a few occasions, but I think it is carrying it too far, because nobody does it out of spite, I don't know that any couple that got married out of spite to Jewishness or Zionism...I feel a congregation he said with what kind of a heart can I give the money for Israel, I want to give you money, I'll give you a lot of money, which he did, but he said your congregation don't want to help me to get Ella magayid, they are making obstacles...actually it wasn't the congregation, it was the Chief Rabbi of Cape Town who put very difficult obstacles in the way, she was in Kutchedan and he wanted her in Cape Town and details which I don't know what has happened

EH

Do you know who was then the Chief Rabbi in Cape Town

JJ

I don't remember

EH

It wasn't Bender

JJ

No it was after Bender...I don't remember, anyway his big mean was why should he help us, he would rather give the money direct to Israel, but he does not want it to go via the Jewish congregation of Vryburg, so he gave us the money every time we would go out we heard the same thing, the Vryburg Hebrew Congregation did not want to help him and he has already had two children by then and they were accepted in the church, the NG. Kerk and they lived very happily, he died a very rich man, and before his demise he took up the N.G. faith to be with his wife's religion. We also had a case in Vryburg, some many many years ago where we were called to do a burial by a Jew who lived up country and was married to a Coloured lady and the police and the magistrate had discovered that in his Will he had requested to be buried on a Jewish cemetery in Vryburg, and it was a lot of humdrum, it was in the period of December holidays where everybody goes away for December holidays and it was the beginning of a heavy rainy season and we performed the burial on the Jewish cemetery

they never practised Judaism, what religion I don't know, they were fairly well dressed up, well mannered, with respect, and this is one of the cases...but there were lots of these type of yidden who lived in the bundu, in the far away places, I know of many more...the one lived on the road to Kuruman...it is difficult to tell who he lived with, whether he cohabited with a Coloured, or a non Jewess...it is difficult to tell, a man must find natural ways out, and if it is not this one, it is the other one...when you live in the bundu and you are ostracized from families, from congregations, from religion, you come once a year to a shul, you don't know what to do any more, for 15 years you never go to shul, so it used to be our duty to go and visit these people, we used to get a lot of money from these people but as far as their personal lives were concerned, we tried to do all we could but there are limits to what you can do and to interfere in grown up people's lives, you can interfere up to so much otherwise if you go too far they tell you to go to blazes, so I imagine there must have been quite a few cases in South Africa because if I can remember two three cases in Vryburg, so you can imagine there must have been some cases in Kuruman

EH

Do you think it was mostly in small places

JJ

Definitely, in small places. In the cities you people know more than we know I don't think I should talk about cities, maybe I'm not qualified, but I do know what I've seen, in the cities I reckon it is the fault of the parents nobody else's, I feel if a parent does not keep up genuine yiddishkeit and does not give his child proper love with a yiddish heart...like we do our children iy id do rsdy got yhm yo dytsy, yhrtr id do muvh sytvyion, there is so much competition...the fault of our Jews is that we contribute our stupid lives to moneymaking and we concentrate too much on money, we forget about love and yiddishkeit to our children and therefore subsequently we paid the penalty when our children strayed, this is my honest opinion about this issue

EH

What age were you when you got married

JJ

I got married the first time was in 1937 and we were divorced...no we got married in '38

EH

How long did you know her before you got married

JJ

I knew her for about a year

EH

How did you meet her

JJ

et her in h. tre ..

I met her at a bus station, she was a lovely girl, a very athletic type of a girl

EH

Where did she come from

JJ

South African born, very fine family

EH

What background, was it East European Jews

JJ

No, Rumanian or Hungarian family

EH

So there was no problem about the background

JJ

No

EH

Were you engaged to her

JJ

Yes I was engaged and subsequently we got married, and we came to Vryburg

EH

Did you save up a bit of money at that time

JJ

Not much money because the first year was absolutely ...but the second year I started doing better and better and then she decided she did not want to stay in Vryburg any more

EH

Where did you get married

JJ

In Bloemfontein

EH

You remember the rabbi

JJ

Yes Rabbi Rom

EH

Did you marry by antenuptial contract or community of property

JJ

Antenuptial contract

EH

Were you consulted, how did you choose it

JJ

I knew nothing about contracts...it was suggested to me that we have antenuptial contract because she was worth a lot and I was worth nothing

EH

So were you quite happy about it

EH

Where did you sign the contract, in a lawyer's office

JJ

I think so

EH

So you divorced in about a year

JJ

Make it twenty months

EH

And how did you meet your second wife

JJ

Well this was really a stupid affair...I decided to get married in Vryburg so I started looking out for Jewish girls, so I quickly ran up about four, the one was an elocution teacher, the one was ...she came from Natal, the other one was a sergeant in the Air Force

EH

A Jewish girl

JJ

Jewish girl, very good dancer

JJ

And the third one was a reverend's daughter, a mohel, who unfortunately fell in love with me because she had in Muizenberg one drink too many, I put her to bed, I locked her down in her bedroom, and subsequently she told me I saved her life from disgrace, and she loves me and I must come and see her in Johannesburg, and the love developed very heavy. I came to Johannesburg, as you know I'm a man of a few words, I told her I worked in Vryburg, I was already almost prosperous, I said I work in Vryburg, I've got a very good job and a very good income, and that night I saw the family, the whole congregation for tea, and I saw the consensus of opinion was that I was approved we were going out to a show and dinner at the Criterion Hotel and going back we were walking really like a pair of stupid lovers hand in hand, and I said to her look would you be interested to marry me, she said I love you so much but I cannot go away from my Johannesburg, you come to Johannesburg...so when she discovered that I had farms and cattle, I said I'm sorry, too late...then there was another girl who discovered from my late ex wife that I'm not as bad a man as one could be, she arrived in Vryburg, she was a lovely, ~~lucky~~ lovely lady, she smoked like a chimney and drank magnificently...I want to play golf with you, I said sure, I played golf with her Saturday afternoon, we came back at the hotel and she drank about at least a half a bottle of gin, and she told me that she heard all about me from my late ex wife and she would like to marry me, no nonsense...I said I'm not ready yet, she was a fine golfer. Then I was in Johannesburg at a furniture factory and I met a Mr. Jackow so he offered me a lift to town, I accepted, and he said I'll give you tea, he

he said come and meet my office people, I don't remember there must have been about 8 or 9 girls or 11 girls and this is my chief bookkeeper, I took no notice of her whatsoever, I don't remember what I asked her or what I said to her, she said would you please get out of my office, I said what do you mean, she said get the hell out of it...I was so annoyed I didn't know what to do, I told her boss, I said you know Jack, I love this girl I'm going to marry her...he said you can marry her over my dead body, blah, blah, blah...I said Jack remember what I tell you, I went back to Vryburg, I phoned her up once, I'd like to see you, can I write to you, she said yes she was going on holiday, she sent me snaps, and I came into Johannesburg, she said come and meet my parents they lived in a tiny little room in Katz Street, she used to sleep on the balcony, she was the bread earner of the family. Her father worked, he was the manager of a big wholesale wollen merchants, that gentleman used to take the enormous salary of £10 a month...I tell you, you talk about antisemitism I could cry about it...£10 a month, he used to wear a suit and get dressed immaculately, shave himself and bath every morning, have a brandy at night all this for £10 a month (end of tape) I said to them tell me would you object if I would like to marry your daughter, they never said anything, the old man said, have a brandy that was the beginning

EH

Where did she come from

JJ

Her father was born in Cheapside Street, London, her mother also comes from England but her mother is not her mother, she was a stepmother, Lilia was I think two years old when her mother died

EH

Now her father was from England, was there no problem ...you were Eastern European Jew, he was English

JJ

No, no, there was a good attachment between us, it worked like a dream, and he was very charming, really he was a hell of a nice old chap

EH

How long were you engaged to her

JJ

About 18 months or something like that

EH

And this time did you also sign antenuptial contract

JJ

Yes

EH

Did you decide on the antenuptial contract

JJ

I don't remember, these things never meant much to me

because I have parted by now with about 95 percent of my worth, there were two children and I provided for Lilia and when I go I won't be a rich man, not that I'm rich today

EH

But you are quite contented with this contract that you signed

EH

Where did you live when you got married

JJ

Well we lived in Vryburg most of our lives

EH

Could you describe the wedding

JJ

I think our wedding was a riot because she was from Johannesburg and I was from Vryburg, the wedding was in the City Hall in Johannesburg...September 1951 we got married

EH

Which shul did you get married

JJ

In Wolmarans Street shul and we had my going away place was in the house of a Mr. Hymie Dettner in Johannesburg, and people travelled from all over the country to the wedding, one fellow travelled about 600 miles with an arm in plaster, Johannes de Klerk...and I had a bottle store, my brother and I in Vryburg, so we provided all the liquor, you should have seen how well off people from Johannesburg took bottles from the tables into their coat pockets we had an orchestra, we had a singer, we had a record made of the wedding, the best man was Dr. Simon Hoffman, he is now a big deal in Israel, and Rabbi Kimmelman proposed the toast of the chosen kalla, I've got it on record, it is fantastic

EH

Did you have a honeymoon

JJ

Yes we had a honeymoon

EH

Where did you go

JJ

We went to Durban by car, I bought a beautiful car, a big Ford car, and then we put the car on the "Edinburgh Castle" and we travelled to Cape Town, we arrived Yom Kippur morning, the ship was late, bad weather, and we stayed with some very nice, very religious Jewish family called Gordon Jaffe and his wife in Kenilworth and I went to a shul I think in Claremont and I sat between late Advocate Bobby Bloch and Mr. Wolf Heller and I enjoyed the service immensely and we spent a few weeks in Cape Town and we motored back

to Vryburg

EH

Now did you have a house

JJ

At that time we had a flat and soon after I bought a house

EH

Did your wife, you mentioned that she worked before she got married, did she work afterwards

JJ

No she did not work in Vryburg

EH

How many children do you have

JJ

I have two children

EH

Could you give me their names and years of birth

JJ

Noelle Sandra, she is our daughter, she is now 31 and Morris Peter Joffe is 28 going on for 29, he is in Boston, he is with the Higher Regency Hotel group, he is director of catering in Boston and the reason why he is named Peter is very interesting story, we had an attorney once Peter de Kock, he was a member of parliament for the United Party and he helped me through ~~thick~~ thin and thick in life he used to swear at me so much but evidently he must have liked me to some degree that he helped me, I wanted to buy a farm and we had no money and he told me you better go and sell chairs or a mattress and one day I hammered him, and he says go and move your bloody cattle to the farm well the first farm we bought we lost so many cattle tracking there, I think we lost about 20 percent of our stock by moving from one farm to another

EH

Were your children born at home

JJ

No born in Vryburg, she was the second child born in the new hospital and Morris was born in Johannesburg

EH

When you got married did you give your wife an allowance or did she just take money whenever she needed

JJ

She used to draw whatever money she wanted...she could do what she liked, it was carte blanc

EH

When you were the first few years in South Africa did you ever discuss the Cape Board of Deputies, did you know anything about it

I never heard of them

EH

What about Morris Alexander, David Goldblatt

JJ

Yes, yes, Morris Alexander I met in Vryburg...he used to come and talk to us Morris Alexander I knew personally very well...he used to come to us very often because he used to love coming to Vryburg, as I said lots of dignitaries of the type of Morris Alexander used to come, they used to come and talk to us, to give us inspiration, talk to us about Zionism, talk to us about the Jewish Board of Deputies, the necessity of the Jewish Board of Deputies, the work that the Jewish Board of Deputies is doing for South African Jewry and all this

EH

Were you involved in communal affairs

JJ

Always involved

EH

What does the Jewish Cape Board of Deputies mean to you

JJ

Today you know I'm getting on in years and a few years ago you might recall I wasn't at all well, so I gradually pulled myself away, a withdrawal, you get lazy, until a few years ago I still attended as a delegate from Cape Town the Zionist Bi Annual Congresses in Johannesburg or in Cape Town wherever it was and always naturally for the Revisionist Party

EH

What does the Jewish Cape Board of Deputies mean to you, does it mean anything

JJ

Oh yes of course it is something that we Jewish people we belong to it, we fall under it, we are under their wings in other words, the thing is God forbid anything happens, immediately we would start thinking I need some help of this type and only body that could assist would the Cape Board of Deputies

EH

Now do you know if there was any difference in attitude towards communal life within the Jewish community, you know like the Anglo German Jews, did they see communal life different than the greeners

JJ

Well I think yes...I have observed for the years that I've been in South Africa that the German immigrants or the German community were keeping to themselves the English Jewry were keeping to themselves and we Russians kept to ourselves but I do think in all sincerity in case of necessity most of the Jews try to pull for the cause together, I more, one less, one better one worse, but the thing is unless you wish to change your religion for one reason or another you are still a Jew

and it is good to be a Jew, personally I have been tempted so many times for conversion, I was now in Idaho Falls in America, I lived with Mormons, wonderful people and Morris spent a year with that family as a Rotary Exchange Student, do you know there wasn't a week or a day when there wasn't a Mormon coming to try to do something to Morris to try and convert him to Mormonism she says until she kicked him out from her house, this was only told to me 18 months ago in Idaho Falls... you see to this degree, and thank God he is a Jew, he's got such a position that he works like a slave, yet Yom Kippur he's got a chance to go to shul ...it is difficult to make friends when you are working in hotel life, you ~~make~~ meet a lot of people but I think the inclination is there ...I have met from ministers upwards down to myself and I've always been proud to be a Jew, I don't take any insults as a Jew from ...an unintelligent man I will take it but from an intelligent man...from one who hasn't got the understanding^A that religion is everyone's own personal decision, personal desire, unless you are not proud of your religion...I've got a fantastic story about that, have you got time...there is a terrific young man in South Africa whom I admire so much, he is a qualified Civil Engineer, he may be one of the youngest in South Africa, and he decided to become interested in the Indian cult. I went on holiday in Durban and he was busy on one of the biggest projects in Natal doing the concrete work, and he started off talking to me about conversion, that he would like to Hindu religion and I have a lot of sympathy for him and I said to him, you know I don't want to dissuade or persuade you but maybe it is possible that you do go to India, learn whatever you like...whether one religion is worth so much to forfeit the other religion that you are born in, what would be your religious benefits you would gain from conversion...you know that the first letter he wrote to me was about 24 pages from India, he is becoming...he is doing very well, he is in Australia at the moment

EH

He is a Jew

JJ

Yes what a charming man, what a lovely boy, he said I was right, he admires, he loves and he appreciates he respects the Hindu religion but he stays as a Jew now I respect every body else's religion

EH

Tell me did you belong to a landsmanschaft

JJ

Yes and no. The yes is that when I used to come to a city I was looking up for landsleit, I used to come to Cape Town and I would pick up a couple of Ponevez chevra, they picked me up, come to the hotel, have a few drinks and talk,

EH

But did they have a society

JJ

I believe in Johannesburg they had a Ponevez shul and Iscka Stein, but I never been there I never had time to attend

EH

Tell me about your involvement in political affairs prior to 1939 in this country, were you interested in political matters

JJ

I was politically a very good South African, in other words my affiliation were more towards Nationalism than anything else, but I felt that during World War II at the beginning that it is a very just cause to go and fight nazism so I voted Smuts United Party, and I joined the Kimberley Regiment on that strength

EH

Would you say that the Jewish question affected you for whom you voted for

JJ

It did in that respect, yes, under those circumstances at that time, it did but I today although I've got a lot of comments to criticise the government even today I still feel for South Africa very much, if things would have been viable domestically I would have been in Israel thirty years ago, I love Israel but in South Africa I am a South African

EH

Tell me on the question of antisemitism, did you ever experience any anti Jewish feelings here in this country

JJ

You know that is not a very easy answer. I had experienced sometimes degradations that I wasnt up to this, I wasnt up to that, I wasnt up to this club

EH

Were you actually made to feel, felt

JJ

Yes, oh yes it happened a few times. I dont know if I've told you that I've been a Freemason for over 40 years and thats a very fine society, you do travel a lot when you are in Freemasonry, you see quite a lot more than one expects in life and out of life but I had experienced, once we were going to play golf in Johannesburg ...for of us, we did not know that they dont want us on that golf course, we did not know they did not take Jews there, and the secretary came up and he says eh you boys, dont dig up our fairways, when he said hay you I felt that he meant hey you Jew boys, so I wanted to walk off that golf course at that moment but the boys said ah to hell with him, we paid already the money lets play

EH

What about in business in the country

JJ

So seldom did we have any kind of antisemitism, not in my case, maybe somebody else has much more to talk about it

EH

Now you know that in the 1920s there was a strong movement to exclude the Eastern European Jews, this led to the Quota Act in 1930, now why do you think this was so

JJ

I think not knowing a lot about it, it could have come from the hard working and the competitive because when they came to South Africa we are hungry for money for work for establishing ourselves, to get somewhere in life having the knowledge that you've got families behind you that depend on you, illness, parents, sickness and all this, so you don't look at the watch, you carry on and on disregarding whereas other people would work from 8 to 3 or 8 to 4 or 8 to 5 and they finish for the day, I used to carry on working because I was a smous, I was a hawker, a traveller, I did not have any hours...I don't know the real political reason why I believe this was when Dr. Malan was the Minister and I think it could have been some kind of a feeling, it was just on my arrival, I wasn't established in any way and I didn't have time to become interested in anything like that

EH

I just want a few questions here about relations between the Anglo German Jews and the East European Jews, was there much socialising, where you lived were there any Anglo German Jews because you lived mostly in the country, or were the majority mostly Eastern European

JJ

Most of them for arguments sake in Vryburg, their roots were all Eastern European Jews, there could have been one German perhaps of German descent and there could have been a couple of English descent, I found the English Jewry more easily approachable than the German Jews in South Africa, I saw the same thing in Israel, I see the same thing in America

EH

Was it acceptable for a greener to marry an Anglo German Jewess

JJ

This was a case as far as I was concerned...but I feel that sincerity and honest fidelity

EH

When you came to this country did they mix did they intermarry the German Jew and the Eastern European Jew

JJ

I tried always to keep away from German Jews because they always tried to prove superiority and I did not like it, I don't like it today, it maybe because I'm stupid, because I'm ignorant that I don't know better

EH

Now tell me most Eastern European Jews learnt English rather than Afrikaans why do you think that was so

JJ

No who says so, I don't believe that, look I learned...I lived for 42 years in the bundu and my Afrikaans is 40 percent better than my English

EH

So would you say that in the country the Jews learned Afrikaans

JJ

So you know that Lila started talking to me in Afrikaans in Vryburg already you become assimilated, you can't help it, you live with them you work with them day and night 365 days a year

EH

Was there much socialising between Jews and English speaking gentiles

JJ

Not much

EH

And what about Afrikaanse speaking gentiles

JJ

More, much more, more between Jews and Afrikaners

EH

And dating gentiles

JJ

Oh yes I never felt inferior

EH

Now what about the Jewish attitude towards Blacks Coloureds and Indians when you were young

JJ

This naturally to me is the sole responsibility in my whole life, having known the "nagiyka" what you call in Russian the whip of my young days, having seen how my late mother had to kiss that man's hand, and having had a knock on the head when the Russian prince passed by and having been shaved in a camp in Baranovich by the Germans and having degradations, you know we have been degraded, looked upon us as not a nice tribe, without a shadow of a doubt my feelings are for a better life for the Blacks, Indians, Coloureds disregarding all of them

EH

What about when you came to this country was there much socialising with these groups, with the non white groups

JJ

Yes I socialised a lot with Indians and the few Coloureds that were in Vryburg and I had some very fine native Black people as friends inasmuch as only once in my life there was a chief at Glen Red this is outside Vryburg

that he asked the native commissioner to invite me to a very big celebration it was the installation and the Minister for Native Affairs, he was a very big fat man, Dr. de Wit I think, he came to attend and I had a full invitation I sat on the dias with them and naturally the Black people celebrated, there must have been forty, fifty thousand

EH

Now would you say that the Jews shared the same attitudes towards these non white groups as to any other white gentiles

JJ

I think that 100 percent of the Jews that I know, a hundred percent, if there are some I would not like to know them or talk about them, they were all sympathetic, very favourably...the thing is if you want to do something physical in support for these people than you must stand up and speak and be counted

EH

Yes but in those days, before the war were the Jews treating or socialising the same way about the non whites as any other white gentiles

JJ

This is something of the most perturbing answer and question to define, you come and you participate in success of the innocence of the other people who have not got the right, and this is equally a guilt which we must accept as a Jew or a gentile or whoever you are that we have been making money from all those people who absolutely work for us for salaries, for incomes which were absolutely minor, absolutely stupid, and we naturally

EH

Did you have a domestic servant

JJ

Yes

EH

Did she eat together with you

JJ

We had a domestic servant, Johanna Mohorosa, for about 23 years one, we had lots of others...we had on many occasions asked her to eat with us, but she declined for the reason that she would make her own food and she did not want to bring her food at our table, our food was not good enough for her, it had to have their flavour, that was her way, and I want to tell you something, she only left us about 2 years ago, she is not well, she is an elderly person, we helped her build a house in her stadt, Lila is sending her a pension, she is paying her R20 a month, we got her a government pension, she gets about four or five $\frac{77}{88}$ parcels a year from Lila, all goodies, clothing, cloth, bedding, what Maurice is sending to her only God knows, he writes to her more than he writes to his mother...when she came here the last time when Lila was sick, she slept here, and she bathed here and she ate here and so on

EH

...a e-ill e-... you reat v...

EH

In your early years, did you treat domestic servants differently to gentiles

JJ

I personally would say they were all the same or better

EH

In what way would you say that

JJ

I think due to the fact that we have had very hard lives knowing what it is... there is one thing I want to tell you on our farms we both, Harry and I, we used to give our labour better than the normal paid salaries and twice as much in the way of rations until one day I was asked by the farmers Union, a senior member, why do you do that, I said its my money, its my business, its my farms I do what I like because it came winter we would give boots, we would give blankets, we would give heavy military coats, we would give caps instead of half a bag of meal, we would give a full bag of meal, we provided meat, we always gave vegetables, sugar, tea, coffee, admittedly the remuneration could have been much higher, should have been much higher but that is the pattern of life that you lead, that you worked with

EH

Thank you

NAME OF INTERVIEWER : MRS. EVE HORWITZ (EH)

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE : MR. JOE JOFFE (JJ)

DATE OF INTERVIEW : MAY 1983

so I ran home, I think I was just over three, and I fell on the corner of the stoop of our new house and I cracked my nose in half and it occurred to me that what the rabbi said I got punished for running away from cheder, then I wouldn't let them do any medical attention until they gave me some coins or sweets, and that was done by a felsher, do you know what a felsher is, and this is why as you see I've got a crack on my nose

EH

Tell me about your father's occupations, was he ever out of work

JJ

No he was not out of work, I think that my late mother sort of inherited, what they used to call an "achsanian" a little pension in Plungyan, I think there must have been room for travellers to sleep over a night to leave parcels, to take messages and I also remember we had a cow, which used to give us a lot of milk and butter and cheese

EH

Who looked after the cow

JJ

I don't remember, everybody, they used to help...in the yard my late father had a big store where a lot of small livestock used to be kept, like a lot of geese and poultry and turkeys, a lot, I would say these must have been in the way of hundreds, I remember turkeys

EH

Was it just for the family use

JJ

No it was all for sale, buying and selling to other merchants, he had a horse and a cart and he had a partner by the name of Yosef Levinson, there is a story told that Yosef Levinson has decided to get married for my late father told him to get married and they went to a little place to see a wife, they arrived in a place and they went in and they saw a lady and they had tea and they came out in the yard and to attend to the horse and to relieve themselves, the idea was to relieve themselves on the horses' heaves in those days, the urine was believed to strengthen the heaves of the horses and he asked the late father, he says do you like her, he says you've got to marry her, not me...he said, look if you like her, then I like her and he married that woman...he came back to Plungyan and he carried on the business of poultry and grains, and this must have been around 1912, I remember the yidden had gone crazy shouting about the release of Bayliss...they ran about in the streets like wild, screaming and shouting, I think it was 1912, and I remember that my late brother Kasriel and late Joe Davner were given specially made winter coats and they were so long that they would walk on the coat, they would trip on it and fall on their noses in the snow because the coat had to last for a number of years, for when they grew up and subsequently, occasionally I was allowed to put on Kasriel's coat but I couldn't walk, I would just fall... and I remember one winter we stole a sleigh with a horse and there was a little ride in town, in the centre of the village and we went for a drive

EH
How many brothers and sisters did you have

JJ

Well we were seven children altogether, an elder sister, her name was Sarah elder brother Kashriel

EH

What was their difference in ages

JJ

About two or three years...then I followed, then a sister Chaya, she was left in Russia, she was not well and nobody of our family knew her fate, we don't know what happened to her, then Harry who has become a very successful business man in South Africa, and then is a sister Shlomit who lives in Israel, married to an American, a very nice family, quite a few grandchildren and my youngest brother Shlomo who got killed about six or seven years ago in a car accident in Sfat and he left a wife and four sons, three sons are married and one is a bachelor, they all live in Ramat Yechanan

EH

Would you know how old was your father when you were born

JJ

When I was born, I have no idea...I can tell you when he passed away, I think he was about 42, he wasn't well, I imagine he suffered with stomach trouble, what actually the illnesses were I don't know. I don't know what to start telling you, I don't know what you want to know but maybe the things that I remember vividly was my cheder days

EH

Yes I'll come to it...I just want to know what was your father's occupation

JJ

He was a produce dealer and subsequently a grain merchant

EH

Did he employ any people

JJ

No he did not employ people...he had as far as I remember a very good and honest reputation, he was at one time the gubbay of the chassidish shul in Plungyan and this is a period I think the period we should start talking to give you information. Now as I tell you I remember my cheder days, I remember running away from cheder, we had built a new house in Plungyan and the rabbi told me not to run away and I knew there would be visitors in the house, and I knew there would be some sweets and pelony or something that visitors used to bring

I don't remember who the promoter of the trip was but I remember we got a hell of a good hiding, not from the owner of the horse and sleigh but I got a hell of a good hiding from my father and mother, I got a lot of hidings in my life

EH

Do you remember what age was your mother when you were born

JJ

No

EH

Was she much younger than your father

JJ

Not very much younger

EH

Did your mother help your father in the business

JJ

Oh yes, oh yes...I remember my late mother was the kind of PRO...I also remember very vividly and she used to talk keetz before meeting the peretz you know what a peretz is, his name was Kashilnes, and I think I'm right in thinking, my memory is always good, she used to kiss his hand when she used to meet the peretz...he was very good to us as far as I know, he used to help with produce and poultry in selling or some livestock with which my late mother dealt with, the other thing I do remember is that when world war I was proclaimed or broken out and before they were chased out from Pumpian to Russia, I believe that Kashilnes or another farming friend had taken a cow away for safe keeping and this cow her name was Brilla, and this was our mainstay after the Russian Revolution when we came back from Vitbesk, Peneves and she got the cow back, and only God knows what we would have done without having had the cow after our return from Vitbesk to Penevez and not Pumpian...in 1914 we left by cart and horse to Penevel, Penevel was the birth place of my late father, we arrived in Penevel and we stayed with relations of our family by the name of Sacks. I remember the two brothers ~~xxxxxx~~ and Joe, Oscar is still alive in Johannesburg, and is married and has two children, a girl and a boy...the girl is married to an El Al pilot who comes from Klerksderp, the boy I don't remember but I'm told he is well off and so is the father, and Oscar who is supposed to be a second cousin of mine is in New York, whether he is still in New York and alive, I don't know...we stayed a couple of days in Penevel and we proceeded by horse and cart to Raveshik, in Raveshik we came and we stayed with our late aunty Rachel who was a sister to our late father, their name was Orelevich...this was the place where we saw for the first time in our lives a train, after staying in Raveshik for a short period we left for Dvinsk by train and in Dvinsk we were met by an uncle Shimon who was an

elder brother of my late father, he was in wholesale cloth business, he was a very nice looking man, he had one son, I think his name was also Kasriel, his leg was slightly impeded and this boy became an engineer. Their fate I don't know...we stayed in Dvinsk in a type of a flat accommodation and I remember having seen quite a lot of military personnel up and down Russian army people. From Dvinsk we left for Ritvesk

EH

Why did you move from place to place

JJ

We had to move from place to place, I imagine it was some arrangement they made between the brothers because in Vitbesk there were two more brothers Zalman, the other one's name I forgot for the moment, and Zalman had left Vitbesk for Moscow, and he had a small business of cloth and pieces of dress material which was by arrangement given to our late father to manage, and we started off that business. This was approximately in 1915 and it was in the centre of the wholesale businesses in Vitbesk. Now being new in the business we all had to help work, so I remember that I started selling suit lengths and given a street to go from door to door and sell the suit length and come back, leave the money, and take another one and this went on for a long time until we made some gains and we became prosperous in a way that my late father and mother became the owners of the business. There was another uncle whose name I forgot, was Shmuel, Uncle Shmuel had a big wholesale cloth business, we were not in any competition to them because ours was a small business but my late brother and I we used to watch where people would come out from another wholesale business and go up to them and say uncle or auntie won't you come and have a look at our business, what we have cheaper, and we managed to build up a little business till such time that I believe we had made a substantial amount of money...we lived in a houseI remember having cut my foot in half on a glass when I walked in rain and I vividly remember the birth of our baby brother Shlomo, it was Rosh Hashana morning, he was born in the morning and I was at home and I saw the whole birth story and I remember that I was sent to the shul the first day Rosh Hashana to tell father that the baby was born and subsequently came home and my late father came with the Balkreah of the shul with the shefar and he came into the room and said "Geet yomtov" and he says "Ken eech blozen them shefar"(can I blow the shefar) so my late mother said "blez" so he blew the shefar this was the arrival of the late Shlomo, the one who got killed in Israel He got killed on his birthday, his 60th birthday

EH

Was it a custom if somebody was born on Rosh Hashana to blow the shefar

JJ

It was a mitzvah (good deed) I don't know if it is a custom, but it is a mitzvah always when you blew shefar and

so this was an incident which one can ever hardly forget. I was then going on for about 8 years approximately, and evidently during these years our parents in conjunction with our uncle decided that we should invest in a property, and we went to look at a property in one of the main streets in Vitebsk and a price was arranged for this property and I shlepped along, we took along bread and salt to put into this building and when on closer examination of the building it was discovered that it was right next door to a Catholic church, so the deal was off and no property was got, evidently there was some prejudice against it so what had happened to the accumulation of money I should imagine that we increased our business, and we had to get some secretarial help or bookkeeping help, this is a very very involved story this secretarial help...I dont know whether you want me to carry on with it. Now she was a Zeitlin girl, she had a brother, this is already I'm jumping on account of these two people to the Revolution, to the Russian Revolution. He joined what party I dont know but he was the anarchy and the girl was in the Communist Party, and she still worked for us, but she had a very high position in the communist party...the shooting interludes that used to go on in Vitebsk every night between the various political groups such as the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks and the Tretsyists and the Lenins and the White Russians, all of them, every night there used to be sporadic shooting...in the morning when you walk out in the streets all you would see is maimed people. In the main street I passed by once and I saw just a head, a human being head bleeding out, and then subsequently I think the Communists got the power hand and all the Anarchists used to be collected up by the Communists and brought before a Communist Court in the park in Vitbesk, a beautiful park, it was in the open and they had their trials and most of them were given a sentence of death, put on lorries with machine guns, taken out of the town, shot and buriedbut when we had decided to leave Vitbesk, we left the shop and gave the keys to this girl, I dont remember her name, that boyfriend of hers was instrumental in helping us leave Vitbesk for Lithuania, for Ponevez , so our whole family whatever we could take alongwe came to the station in Vitbesk in the middle of the night, we were all together inclusive of late grandfather his name was Yehuda Asef Ketzen, who lived till 105, and we were given, on the station, we were given cholera injections under the shoulder blade, I think the size of the injection was no less, I think it must have been a four inch injection under the blade, cholera, we were then pushed in an ordinary goods truck, or cattle truck, and I think with 42 people...there were some wooden racks, shelves in the truck and some time during the darkness the train pulled out, I dont know where, but we did arrive in a place called Baranovich which was under German occupation. We were all taken to a camp with barbed wire and the following day, then we had to go

through a process of delousing and we had to stand up on benches and we were sprayed with some stuff, and then we were given our clothes and we were given bread, German brown bread with a little marmalade and black coffee. Now how long we stayed there I dont remember but it could have been three weeks, and then we were put in a truck again and we were sent to the Lithuanian border, every where you looked was under German occupation lots of shooting, lots of killing, and you couldnt ask questions...when we arrived in Ponevez in the middle of the night, we had a lot of shooting and a hell of a noise of fowls screaming their heads off...what transpired to be is that there must have been on the station a truckload of fowls going somewhere and thieves broke in and stole the fowls and took them out one by one. The arrival in Ponevez was that we had nothing

EH

Why didnt you go back to Pompian where you came from

JJ

I dont know why, I believe I was told that Pompian was razed to the ground by the Cossacks, there was nothing left of it, Ponevez had a bit of a Jewish centre, had about four synagogues, three synagogues I remember, maybe four, and this was still under German rule...a military orchestra used to play every Sunday afternoon on a square and we lived in a very small kind of house, we had a part of a house, our landlord was Brewer and he had a son, Geditke, who was a type of a....today you would call him a playboy, and we managed to get Brilla, our cow, back to Ponevez which was a distance of 24 viersts, approximately 24 miles I would say today, and I dont remember the passing space of time, what late father did, he must have dabbled a little bit in produce and livestock to try and earn a rouble, whether we brought money back from Russia, as you know you did not know what currency you had, you came back multimillionaires, you had any type of paper money but you couldnt buy a thing with it, so we moved from that place to more central situated part of a house in town where we had divided a bedroom into four or five by means of partitioning, my Zayda had one, late Sarah had one with Chaya, and I think we as boys slept in the other one and late Dad and late mother slept in a portion of the dining room...there was a kitchen with a big stove the old type of stoves which used to warm up the wall of the dining room, and late Zayde used to get every Friday morning by post ten dollars from his son in Reading, Pennsylvania, his name was Shlomo Shear Ketzen, that was his original name, Ketzen. Naturally we used to try and talk him out of the ten dollars, we knew where to change it, he was beautiful, he was so wonderful, he was so clean, I think he was married three times, his whole family were in America but it was a peculiar way, his departure, his demise, he used to go every Friday to the sauna, to the baths, and there we used to go along with him sometimes, and you know the old type of a bed (bath) was a big room with a floor and lots of big stones underneath. The stones used to be fired and

then you used to throw on them water and it would throw up steam, you were given a wooden bucket and a kind of a broom, a green leaved broom, and you used to go in there and you used to knock the hell out of your back, and then take that bucket with water and throw it over your head and come out and get dressed and go home. So after about three or four weeks when he did not receive letters from his elder son in America, he went to the bath on his own, Friday morning, and he must have been very tensed up and excited about not having received the letters and he came home and evidently he forgot to put on his trousers which he would put in the volekes, that is something which you used to put in your shoe, made out of wool, very thick, but he forgot to put his pants on, and he came home in that cold temperature I imagine he must have developed pneumonia. He used to have his glass of vodka every Friday night when he used to come home from shul, drink a glass of neat vodka and say "Lechaim", we did not drink it, my late father did not drink, and he took ill on Saturday, we had the doctor and the doctor said he had pneumonia, he was given some medicine, he was so beautiful, so spotlessly clean, his little room, the little divided room must have been six by four no more and he was lying in bed and there wasn't much room, and the following Friday about one o'clock, I went in to see him, and he said to me "Yeshka" There were a few yiddin saying "Tilim" (Psalms) and we all came and we were standing there and he was looking at us and he was looking at us, and I think it must have been about seven or eight o'clock in the morning, he looked round once in the room and he closed his eyes...and he was buried that same Friday, I remember that we laid him out in the middle of a lounge in the dining room where the Chevra Kadisha attended to him, and we knew that his age was in the vicinity of 105 or 106 because his eldest son died when he was 87 in Reading, Pennsylvania. Now this was the end of late Zayda

EH

Did you go to the funeral

JJ

Yes, oh yes, it was cold

EH

Can you tell me how the funeral

JJ

I don't remember

EH

Did you wear any mourning

JJ

I don't remember, I'll think about it, if I'll recollect something I'll write it down and I'll tell you later on, but he was a wonderful, wonderful character.

EH

Who used to do the cooking

JJ

I think late mother did a lot of cooking, and maybe his third wife was still alive, I don't remember seeing her

EH

Were they kosher your family

JJ

Oh yes, very kosher

EH

Kept Shabbat

JJ

Oh yes, oh yes, very kosher, from. Our late father was the gubay of the Chassidische shul in Pumpian, I remember one Simchat Torah they carried him home, he must have had a bit of wine too much, oh yes we were a religious family, we used to go to shul regularly and eat kosher, they did not know what treif was except one day in Vitebsk I went in dafke Pesach, I had a couple of kepecks on me and I bought a pastry which wasn't kosher, and I ate the damn thing and I got the hell knocked out of me when I came home they knocked the tripe out of me and I was locked up, I remember that

EH

Did you go to shul

JJ

Oh yes we used to go to shul and daven very religiously, even in Penevez, we used to go to the shul and I remember that late father used to spread his tallis over us and we had to stand up practically all the time yomtev...oh he was fine, late father was a fine man

EH

Do you remember any anti Jewish outbursts

JJ

The anti Jewish outbursts that I can remember vividly was once in Vitebsk when the Prince Nicholas came to visit Vitebsk there was a lot of outbursts in the street, there was something said against yiddin, I didn't know, I didn't realise that I had to take my hat off when the procession was going, I got my hat knocked off and I got a good stump by somebody by somebody I don't know who, I was trying to look, vividly I saw the procession pass but I kept I cannot say that I saw the prince. Now there were outbursts, anti Jewish in Penevez, we came back and there were the take-over bids, also by the Lithuanians, by Whites, by Germans, by Poles and every night there was a different government...there were Lithuanian soldiers with rifles and bayonets stormed our house, they stood around my late father and they said uncomplimentary things about the yiddin, all they wanted was money, gold and watches...the main attraction for them were watch-

and they used to call it "Jeda Rugus" in Lithuanian, I think the only man that possessed a watch at that time in the family was late father. It was a nice golden watch you know with a gold cover and they took that away, they took away everything they wanted that they thought was of some value or attraction and they left. Subsequently we were without a government in Ponevez and two Germans arrived, one machinegun between the two of them and they took over the town and they stayed from the morning till the evening, they had a good feast, and they took the machinegun and went back the same way they came. Now the Lithuanians were busy establishing the take over of power and one day before...Ramagela Street, two horsemen on horseback and two individual people following them with ropes behind the horses, they were two yiddishe people, aged people, which these soldiers picked up in the forest out of town and they came in on that market square in Ponevez and they shot them both dead in front of all the shops around the square, the stones were cobbled, beautifully cobbled, and a Mr. David Shulman very attractive looking man came running out from the shop, they had a liquor business and to the best of my recollection he shot both of these horsemen and he ran back to the shop and I think the same day he made for the Danzig border and he went to Israel where the family were established very, very fine people, there were several brothers, very good looking men and I was told that David Shulman passed away a matter of a few years ago in Israel. There were anti Jewish riots by the Polish students who were trying to molest our girls which we as youngsters, you could even say tough youngsters we did not like it, we did not permit it, we used to have scuffles with wood pieces of timber, pieces of iron, we used to fight the Poles, I think on a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday, you would call it some sportsground and in winter we used to go skiing on the River Neva, which is a beautiful river, we had problems, the Polish boys would try to molest our girls, but we had always protected our girls. There was once a Saturday night, one of our girls skating and a Polish boy fancied her very much and she did not want to know his troubles and he was a champion skater, he used to skate not on ordinary skates but it was like a knife, like a blade, and he skated past her and he cut through her thigh, right through her dresses and underwear, she was bleeding so profusely that we laid her out and we made some tourniquets and we got her quickly for medical attention, that boy who did it was very well looked after by us boys afterwards...the Polish crowd were not sympathetic towards us in these days...I don't know in which line you want me to speak about because so many things come to mind

EH

About antisemitism

JJ

We got to school where there was a Russian gymnasium, Polish gymnasium, Lithuanian gymnasium or high school and the Hebrew High School, the yiddishe

school...admittance to the school was by way of IQ, for instance, I was called in and I was asked a few questions of the Chumash...and they told me I go in to Standard 3, I remember two very distinguished financially brothers in South Africa, they came in one of them had a hell of a bad running nose and they asked him the most simple question in the world, and they didn't know, so they put him in second class, I was put in third class

EH

How old were you

JJ

I don't remember but let's try and work it out, we came back after the Revolution in October 1917, this was 1918

EH

You were about eleven

JJ

I was twelve because I had my barmitzvah in the Ponevez yeshiva, in the Junior yeshiva

EH

First tell me about your school and then tell me about your barmitzvah

JJ

The school was Hebrew High School and we had teachers come from Austria and Germany and Lithuanian language was a compulsory language, we had a Lithuanian Christian lady teaching us Lithuanian, and we had a teacher for maths was Rabinowitz, and we had a teacher from Austria a teacher for geography and history, his name was Dr. Rosenfeld

EH

Were all the other subjects taught in Hebrew or in Lithuanian

JJ

Most of it was taught in Hebrew...these were difficult periods as far as I was concerned, I found a lot of interest in skiing, swimming and we had just about formed the Maccabi, athletics, and I think already at that time I started dabbling in soccer for Maccabi, and as boys we used to start smoking a bit on the quiet, we did not have any cigarettes, we used to pick up stompies and smoke them, I remember we used to try and make cigarettes out of matches and try and burn that, and we used to play games like the American baseball, we used to call it laktu, almost very, very similar and being left handed I did very well at that, and naturally I neglected my books and I came home, my first certificate or report, and it was so black, it couldn't be worse, I think I remember I had five twos, they knocked the tripe out of me, I was given hell

EH

Who used to give the punishment

JJ

Mother

everybody used to knock me, so I went back with late mother to school, and the man teacher said you can do it if you want to learn, he says I'll give you a chance to do this paper and in a week's time I'll see if I can push you through to the next class, and I answered every question but having had 4 questions left I battled with the Lithuanian language because we spoke mostly yiddish, Russian ...quite good German and a little bit of Hebrew, Hebrew wasn't bad and I remained for a second year in Standard 3, then the Lithuanian government was already established with a Jewish minister for Jewish Affairs, he was in other words a representative to the what you would call the Parliament in Jewish Affairs, I think his name was Dr. Rebinson, if I remember correctly, I'm open to correction there, and when naturally the Lithuanians started bickering on the Jewish population, they became advanced, more so, we having then already a wonderful Maccabi organisation. This must have been already towards 1920, '21, I think that late Jabotinsky came to Penevez in 1921 and he addressed Maccabi, which was a beautiful crowd of terrific looking Jewish children and he spoke to us in Russian and when he came in, he turned round and said, wesabbaki, you couldn't have heard a pin drop, and he gave a few seconds silence and then he said, do you know why I called you dogs, nobody said a word, he said because you are the vanguard, you are the protection of the broken Jewry after the war, skirmishes, revolutions, and he spoke to us, and since that day I've been a Revisionist all my life

EH

He made such an impression on you

JJ

Yes, I still am, and I'm a monthly contributor to the Revisionist Party

EH

Tell me about the Maccabi, how was it established

JJ

That was something unreal, the Maccabi Penevez was the second biggest in Lithuania, I've got photos, I'll show them to you and we had instructors who came from Austria to teach us athletics, gymnastics, and we had events, and we built a soccer field and we had it closed in beautifully and we used to play soccer, we used to play the Lithuanians, the Poles, and all was fought out on hard political religious grounds, do you understand what I mean, it was hard because you know we were not liked and there was jealousy and I want to tell you that when we used to play Keras, Keras was the Lithuanian Soccer Team in Penevez, it was like the cup final in England, the commandant and the fire brigade orchestra, would come on the field, walk through town and blow their heads off, and the commandant would come on the field and shake hands with everybody, with all players and the whole stadium was full up...I get goose pimples when I talk about the soccer because there

was a time when I played the second team, I've got photos, I was even once a reserve player for Maccabi Kovne, they used to play in Shavel, Wilkambia were all established Maccabi societies...Maccabi Penevez was nicer than Kovne

EH

Did you also have speakers coming to talk

JJ

Oh yes we had fun, we were naughty boys and girls and one Simchat Torah the yeshivet bechurim had their refreshment and the cakes and they went out of town and they had a party, they ate everything up and they drank the lot and subsequently we were all caught red-handed, the yeshivet bechurim they knocked the hell out of us and they laid charges with the police against us the rev was not good enough, nobody could intervene until this Dr. Rebinson I think he was the editor of the Yiddische Steima in Kovne, the newspaper the daily yiddische paper came down to hear an arbitration court, some of us had checking wounds, they hammered us, and he managed to arbitrate that they should let us off so they did not take it any further

EH

Did your father help your mother with any jobs in the house

JJ

No, never, because he had to work for a living and there were so many of us children that we gave a helping hand

EH

Did you have regular chores that you had to do

JJ

This is difficult to say. sometimes we were told to do something and we used to do it quite willingly because there was no one else to do it, but mainly these chores fell on our late sisters that are no more, the late Sarah and the late Chaya, they were very useful, we were a big family

EH

Tell me did you have to say grace before and after meals

JJ

Oh yes we used to say before meals and Friday night we used to bench

EH

Tell me a bit about Friday night supper, what did you eat

JJ

Friday night supper, before we carry on with that I must tell you my barmitzvah party. I got barmitzved in the Penevez yishuva...the rabbi Kahaneva was the chief and I was called up on the bimah, I don't remember what day of the week it was

EH

It wasn't Shabbat

JJ
I dont think so, it could have been but I dont think so...I said my hafterah and I came home and I was given a slice of bread and a big plate of vegetable soup and this was the party of my barmitzvah, this is something I will never forget in my whole life, this is all I got because things were difficult and not everything was available at that time in our lives being under the Lithuanian rule, things were difficult

EH
Was it acceptable to have parties after a barmitzvah

JJ
No there was no party

EH
Yours maybe because they were difficult times

JJ
It was (a) because it was difficult times and (b) because we were a big family and there was no time for celebrations or to make a party

EH
How many times a week did you eat meat

JJ
Meat...we used to eat quite a bit of poultry, kosher meat was very expensive and I would say we would have meat for Friday night, maybe two three times a week perhaps, two times for sure, but Friday night was the meal of the week and we used to say grace, we used to bench after the meal, and my late father used to smoke, but he never smoked on Shabbat, he was the gabay at the Chassidishe shul which closed down just before the 1914 war, but all in all I think we were a respectable family because he would not allow anyone to disappear once you were in shul and play in the yard, he wouldnt allow it

EH
Were you allowed to play on Shabbat

JJ
You mustnt forget that we were tough children being brought up in world war I the Revolution, coming back to Lithuania and after you have seen so many atrocities in life, so many killings, so many maimings you became very very hardened, you become hard, and it is difficult to say that we did not play on Shabbat, we would go out Shabbat afternoon, what can you do Shabbat afternoon youngsters with girls, I wouldnt say we did not play on a Shabbat

EH
Tell me did your father have larger helpings than the rest of the family

JJ
No he did not, he was not a big eater, he was very tall, I think he was about six feet tall and he had a lovely little Smuts beard and had beautiful eyes, he was not a man of a lot of talking, he was a very sincere type of a man, I think he was terribly honest

EH
If he would say to a farmer, this is it, it was it...or he will pay him on this and this day for the grain, it was paid, there was no argument, if he did not have the money he would borrow the money and pay

EH
Were you allowed to talk at the table when you were eating

JJ
Well there wasnt much time to talk, the food wasnt too much so you had to eat

EH
What if you left food on the table

JJ
Nobody ever left food, forget about it

EH
Was your mother an easy person to talk to

JJ
Oh yes she was all right

EH
And your father

JJ
Also

EH
If you had any troubles, to whom would you go

JJ
My troubles were mainly girls, girls, and again girls, sneaker, playing all kind of games, skiing, skating, I was not a popular child in the family because I was naughty, I was so naughty you have no idea, I used to get so many hidings, I used to get locked up so often

EH
How did you feel about it

JJ
Good because I knew I was doing wrong, I knew whatever I did was wrong, I was not punished for nothing

EH
How did your parents expect you to behave towards them

JJ
With obedience, lots of obedience, with respect, with great respect

EH
Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things important in life

JJ
Yes mainly I used to be lectured day and night ...they used to say Yeska we are giving you the opportunity to study, to learn, and if you dont learn you will grow up an idiot without any education, I knew that was my

they tried but as I said I wasn't interested, as I tell you I had other more important items than learning

EH

Would you say that the ideas of how to behave in life you received from both of your parents or did one play a more important part

JJ

I think mother played a closer part because she was more, I had more to do with her, late father had his job to provide a living...as I told you when I came back with my bad report I went to mother and I got the hell knocked out of me, and then I went to my father and he was most perturbed, he says I don't understand you, I don't understand you, you've got a good brain and you're not using it, so I said I'm sorry I'll try next time, but the next time came and I remained for the second year in Standard 3, and that was the Alpha and the Mega of my education

EH

What age were you when you left school

JJ

I think I must have been round about 16

EH

In the Russian school did you experience any antisemitism

JJ

We were in the Hebrew School, this was all the education I had, the Hebrew School in Class 3, when I failed I remained in Class 3 and therefore I went out to work

EH

Now tell me what type of work did you do

JJ

Well the first work I did was approximately in 1920, I started helping my late brother Kasriel and late father in the produce, the work I used to do was mainly providing grain and selling meal or feed for chickens, I was born in it, I was brought up in produce so you learn it automatically, it becomes your second sense you start knowing the weight and the value of wheat and corn, bran, you learn to know by your fingers, by your eyes, you don't need any machines when you are born in the trade, you pick up a handful of wheat you can say how much the wheat weighs

EH

Did they pay you

JJ

No, I used to get a little bit of pocket money

EH

What did you spend it on

JJ

Pocket money, I used to spend it girls, sneaker and smoking a little bit on the quiet, normal boy's entertainment of that age

EH

How long did you work for your brother

JJ

Not for my brother, I worked for my late father, you see when late Kasriel left for South Africa in 1923 I think

EH

Why did he come to South Africa, did you have family there

JJ

No, this is a long story. Actually late Sarah and late Kasriel and I, I think Chaya also, we were all booked to go to America to our family, we had the money sent to us and in 1922, or '24, the Immigration from Lithuania, from Russia to America was stopped, cut off, I don't know if you have that knowledge so there was no alternative, we had to get out

EH

Why

JJ

To earn some money, to bring in some more money...now we had some relations in South Africa and that was on my late mother's side, very nice family, he is still alive, his name is Mr. Harry Solomon, he was a vice school principal in Benoni, and he helped us with the documentation to enter South Africa so the first one to go was late Kasriel on his own, I don't remember what the fare was but it was a matter of about £12 or £15 was the ticket from...he had a mishpecha, she was a Mrs. Zippah who was very helpful, and her late husband Abe Zippah, very friendly, very good to us, and after Kasriel left I worked in the shop well...I got a telling off but I inherited the peltz, you know what a peltz is, a kind of a fur coat for winter and the velikes from late Kasriel and I worked the shop was very narrow and very long and we had to bring in bags of 300 lbs weight and put them from low to higher and higher and higher almost to the ceiling, we used to put the bran as it was light, we used to keep the heavy stuff down and everything had to be weighed on a scale, somebody wanted a quarter bag, a half a bag, but we were well known, my late father and mother had a good name and we were very well supported, we used to eke out a living but I cannot remember how much finance because I don't know, I wasn't particularly interested and when I left and Harry took over from me the same job he inherited the same peltz and the velikes...I had photos of this, beautiful photos I tell you they are worth a fortune, I don't know where the hell they are...Kasriel left for South Africa, he arrived here and Mrs. and Mrs. Zippah helped him, took him off the boat and he stayed with them for a short while and then he proceeded to the Transvaal. He got a job somewhere in a Concession store in a place called Mariasberg and he worked for a Mr and Mrs. Kravitz

and I think his commencing salary was £5 a month. From these £5 a month which was all found, board and lodging, he saved all the money and he used to send sometimes the whole £5 back home because they needed it badly, late father was ill, and he got a £1 rise and when he had a little bit more money he sent me a ticket two years later in 1926, we will have to leave my sporting career out for the time being. In 1926 I left via Hamburg in the German Africa line to Cape Town

EH

Tell me about your journey, what were the conditions

JJ

On the ship the conditions were good because we didnt know better, we travelled third class and the passengers were mainly Jewish going to South Africa from all over Lithuania, the assembly was Habag, Hamburg, and I think the food was good

EH

What about the hygienic conditions

JJ

Very good, there was nothing wrong with the boat, the boat was called "Usamara" a German boat, this boat scuttled itself during World War II outside East London, and when I arrived in Cape Town I heard somebody screaming "Jeffe, Jeffe, Jeffe" it was a Mr. Krafchick from Cape Town, he says "Eich ben gecumen arunter nemen fun shif, eich heb far eich paperin and eich vart af eich" (I have come to take you off the ship, and I have ~~ap~~ papers for you) and I didnt know who he was

EH

Did your brother arrange that

JJ

Yes, my brother and subsequently Mr. Krafchick, and my aunt Mrs. Ray Zippah came to see me on the boat

EH

Tell me when you arrived did you have to go through any tests, were the authorities pleasant

JJ

Oh yes, there was no problem, I had a guarantee for South Africa from this cousin, mishpecha of ours from Benoni, Mr. Solomon, that he is my guardian and this affidavit of his guardianship was handed over to the authorities and I had no problem in getting off the boat

EH

Did you have to write a test

JJ

Nothing, I had 2/6d in my pocket

EH

How did you spend your first few days

JJ

My first few days I spent in a boarding house

EH

Where was it

JJ

I think it must have been in the Gardens somewhere or in that area, it wasnt far from town, and I was given a bit of pocket money, I dont remember how much by Mr. Abe Zippah, and a funny incident happened, my God, I'll never forget that, the first Friday I was in the boarding house, and they gave such beautiful fish to eat, I ate whatever they put on my plate, and then I asked for some more fish, I got a kick in my leg, it wasnt nice to ask for second helping, but it was beautiful gefilte fish, I mean I had not had it in years fish like that, although we used to have fish this was terrific, and I met some boys and girls I couldnt speak the language

EH

How did you manage

JJ

I dont remember, I remember we went to the Waldorf Cafe here in Cape Town, we were invited for tea and pastries, and the guy who invited us walked out on us and he left the girl and me to pay, I didnt have the money, the girl I dont remember who she was, she paid but I took a poor view of that other fellow, it was a terrible thing to do, but it happened and I dont remember if I repaid that girl the money, and I stayed with the Zippahs for I think about a week or maybe two weeks, ~~there~~ ^{they} were ~~xxxxxxx~~ busy building a house in Oranjezicht, this is why they stayed in a boarding house, and Kasriel sent me £5 for a railway ticket which was only for 3rd class, and I took out a third class ticket and Abe Zippah gave me a present of a gold pound a gold severieng I ever had in my life, but I would not change it, I had sandwiches, she gave me and some fruit, and I went into third class, which was at that time only for Blacks, non whites...when the conductor came in he says why are you sitting here, well I said my ticket is third class he says all right you come with me, and he put me in a second class compartment, and I arrived in Germiston about two days later or something travelling through the Karoo, which was miles and miles of nothing, and you get lots of thoughts when you travel through the Karoo and you come from a fertile country like Lithuania or Russia or Poland...I arrived in Germiston and my cousin who is still alive in Johannesburg, he is a retired maths teacher, Mr. Harry Solomon was there to meet me, he was then already a vice principal in some school in Benoni and we took the first train to Benoni to his family, his father and mother had a store in Princes Avenue in Benoni selling furniture, the father was a carpenter by profession and they had

a big family, I think they were four brothers and a sister, and this was October, I spent the month of November there idling, doing nothing, looking for work until someone told me there was a job going in Venreindick at the Benner Brothers shop; anyhow I went out to Vereindick

EH

Was it a mine

JJ

It was a mine, Venreindick mine, and he had a look at me, he said £3 a month free board and lodging, I said I'll take it because £3 a month was equivalent to 150 lit Lithuanian currency and we needed that money badly, so I started work and my main job was to weigh out leaf tobacco, you know the leaves that the Blacks break up to put in their pipes smoking tobacco, that type of leaf we used to make it a ticky and sixpence wrapped up in paper, and the natives would come in from the mines and buy it by the ten

EH

What about the language problem

JJ

The language I started picking up a little bit, and after the first month I worked there, it was the month of December, the boys from the eating house told me the shop will be closed for three or four days, you know Christmas and Boxing Day and Sunday, so I went to Kasriel, my brother in Mariasberg so I asked Mr. Benner if I could have two days off, you greener vasser, noch nit on ge varmed de fees und du vilst sheen feren af holidays" (You green water, you have not yet warmed your feet and you already want to go on holidays), I said to him the word bastard I don't like, the boys told me it was an ugly word, I said you must not call me bastard I don't like it, so he says "You bastard" so I said to him Mr. Benner be careful, I held a two pound weight in my hand, he said "You bloody bastard, you want holidays" I said I'm giving you notice and I let that two lb fly, and thank God I missed him. I left the shop I went in and I packed my suitcase and I went to take the train to Benoni and I didn't ask for money and I didn't get any money, but he took his cart and he ran in to Benoni to the Solomons and he left for me a cheque for £3.6.0d because I worked three days over and above the month £3.6.0d I got and that was my first experience. When the weekend was over the beginning of the following week in January I thought I must get a job and I was already fluent in a few English words, and I wrote out on a piece of paper, and I walked up to the top of Princes Avenue and I went criss-crossed every shop, I said do you need an assistant, have you got a job for me, the things I wrote out in Yiddish or in Russian I don't remember but I said it in English, until I walked into a little shop and there was a real talmudistic yid with long hair with a kapote (long coat) and he says yes I've got a job, I said how much do you pay, I didn't want to know what it is, he said it's a big job, it's a smous, can you smous, I did not know

what the word smous was, I said sure how much do you pay, he said £6 a month all found, I said I'll take it...no, no, £5.10.0, and he said where did you smous, I said I smoused in the Verndick mine...I had to have a job, so he says you come here on Monday morning very early with your things and I'll take you to the station, I will buy you a ticket and you will go to Johannesburg and you will change trains on this and this platform, and you will go to Velverdig, you take the Vilviberg train from Velvedeen to Lichtenburg and my son Itzka will wait for you at the station, in a Tom Mix hat with breeches and leggings, and he is very small but he is your boss Itzka. I arrived in Velveding and I changed trains for Lichtenberg and I was sitting in a compartment and in came a very tall, a beautiful lady and a very short little man and I am sitting, 'I'm not talking anything, and I understood the lady saying to the man in English, he could be Jewish, but what a good looking man, what a good looking child, what a good looking boy and they started talking to me in a very slow English, who I am and where I come from, and where I'm going, so I said I'm going to a place called Vreismeersbildt, and I'm going to work for Mr. N.S. Bobs...he said Oh my God what are you going to do there, and I said I'm going to be a smous, you see I was frightened to ask for the interpretation of the word smous in case I lose the job, so he said are you a smous, I said oh yes, we arrived at Vreismasbildt and with excitement I lost sight of them, the lady evidently went on to Lichtenberg, she was a Mrs. Levy from Petshefstroom, and the short man was Mr. Bobs, the big boss who I was going to work for, his brother Itzka was the manager, he was working for the man that was with me in the train so Itzka was on the station and he had a couple of Black boys with him to take my suitcases and we walked across to the ~~xxxxxx~~ house, a shop and a butchery. And they told me this is your bed and this is the fellow that is working here I think his name was Salke, and this is Mr. Harry Craig who is a cattle buyer a cattle dealer and then I unpacked a little bit and I came out on a veranda which was on the main road, out comes Mr. Bobs the Boss, and he says to me Jeffe I'm the boss and Itzka is the manager, the smous whose place I'm going to take will only arrive on Thursday, he says in the meanwhile you can help in the shop, and in the butchery and in the kitchen...he said can you cook, I said who can't cook, he said what can you make, I said I can make fricadels so I went into the butchery and the butcher gave me mince and I used to fry fricadels for an army, they were damn good, with onion and egg and a little bit of flour, they were hot, real good...I am introduced to everybody as the smous, the hawker in English, but I had sleepless nights not knowing what the hell I'm in for. Thursday afternoon, you heard the clatter of horses hooves and the rattle of a wagon, and Itzka says Oh there is your smous coming. It was a pair of mules with a wagon, a Black boy was sitting there he was driving it and an elderly gentleman on a wagon, and he came down, I don't remember his name and he shook hands with me and he said you are the smous I said yes

and they started taking off boxes with little bits of weighed out groceries like coffee packets and tea packets and sugar and candles and matches and all these things and a little bit of clothing and then came off a lot of eggs and chickens and turkeys, you know things which you trade in normally, and he said that's it, I thought God Father this is a piece of cake to the work I used to do, to sit on top of a wagon and to ride, they showed me how to check out, that you must give an account ...you see when you go out you are booked out with so many items to the value of so much, when you come back you've got to account for it in cash and trade in, like skins and hides, dry ones, wet ones...I don't remember the prices but I think eggs were about a tickey or fourpence a dozen, fowls were about sixpence, and skins were for nothing, but you used to trade in with the Blacks on the location or where they used to work on the diamond diggings ,...it's a beautiful little place, it's on the Mooli River, beautiful...and naturally Monday morning I had to go out so everything was packed in the boxes and put on the wagon, Thank God I had the same boy that the old man used to have so he helped me all the time you see the money I already understood, the tickey, a shilling, ten bob, a pound and so on, and I knew that I was responsible for the goods, I did business with the Blacks, mainly Blacks and then I started on whites, and when I increased the business, he increased my salary to £6 and then £7 from £5.10.0 I would send £5 home every month and ten shillings I used to keep, I had everything free and I started playing tennis a little bit

EH

Where did you live

JJ

I lived in the house but I used to go out for two, three days at a time, and while I was out a few times I slept under the wagon too, a bit of antisemitism but some farmers wouldn't let you in, it was not a political issue, but it was a dirty issue why they would not let me in...he told me subsequently after we became such big friends that he went in once to a big firm in Potchefstroom to buy a span of oxen and a wagon and he undertook to pay after the harvest and he signed a bill for it, and they had a look at the signature, and said it is not a good signature, they threw the paper behind the counter and they made him sign another one, and he insisted that he paid twice for that span of oxen and the wagon, and he didn't want to know my troubles, I went back to him, he was an elderly man, had a very wealthy family, from him and his sons and the Blacks that worked for him, I could make a living comfortably, and I said look what happened with you and the other people is not my problem, why should I suffer, and he said you are quite right, carry on doing business and I used to sleep there too, but one day he used to call me You, he couldn't say Joe he said you come here tomorrow or next week, then we will go together to Potchefstroom in my cart and horses, he is going to make out a Will, a Testament, to attorneys, Low and Nell, in Potchefstroom and he made out the

and he made out the Will and I signed as a witness, and after I signed as a witness, I did not know what I was signing we came out and he gave me a couple of sovereigns, gold, and he took me back and I carried on my work he was such a fine man that when late father was very, very ill and we got an SOS to send money, I borrowed from him twentyfive pounds, in sovereigns, and I went to the post office and I sent it off in relays, every day or every week, the twentyfive pounds went home because late father had to go to Germany for medical attention...I repaid every cent to the old man with great, great, gratitude. This was the first time in my life I ever borrowed money, and subsequently I borrowed some money from Harry, but I never borrowed money from anybody but it was a life, I became very well liked by the Afrikaaners

EH

You picked up the language

KK

Oh yes

EH

Afrikaans

JJ

Oh yes, I used to go to Potchefstroom by lift and I met yiddishe girls, and I was naughty, hell I was naughty, but they all liked me

EH

How did you meet them

JJ

My boss used to live in Potchefstroom, and I would go there for a weekend and I had lots of girls, beautiful girls, and we used to dance a lot and sing a lot, I picked up the language as fast as a human being could

EH

Did you pick up first Afrikaans or English

JJ

There was a teacher of the school in Reichenberg a Mr. Keat, who gave me a few lessons in English, he charged me 3d, nothing practically, I think I must have had about six or eight lessons perhaps or ten lessons, and then I met a gentleman who drove a beautiful little Renault car, it looked like a little tank, he came into the shop, he said to me Joffe I want you to meet my daughter ...beautiful, lovely, lovely girl, goodbye, he went off, he came round again and said Joffe I want to talk to you, he says I want you to marry my daughter...I'll give you the farm, I'll give you cattle, I'll give you money, I'll give you everything...you know this was the first confrontation in my life that I had such a thing happen to me, that I needed stability, that I needed help goes beyond thinking...I don't know where I got it from that I was a superguy that I did not want a "gereter shidduch" (Matchmaking)

this put me off, hf he did not say marry his daughter, most probably I would have loved her, it did not make much difference to me, she was a lovely, healthy girl, I felt that I did not want a "gereter shidduch" (matchmaking) I said no, naturally I thought I made a mistake all my life, who knew what would have happened, who can tell, the girls in Potchefstroom told me that I was getting too fat, I was putting on ~~xix~~ weight, so I went to my boss, I said I heard that there were so many jobs offered on the mines, on the Reef in Johannesburg, Krugersdorp, I said I think I want to leave your work. He says I wouldn't like you to do it, I'll give you more money, I said the girls say I look like a pumpeen...I heard they were paying £15, £12 for an assistant in a shop £17 on the mines for a salesman and I qualified myself as a salesman so I gave him notice, they were very good to me, very very good, and I came to Johannesburg...I stayed with a cousin of ours, a second cousin of ours, the one from Ponevel, Oscar Sacks, and I started walking about, talking to the boys, I was told there was a job in Nigel, I took the train out there, Geduld Extension and I walked from Springs or Brakpan, I don't remember to Geduld Extension to the Concession store, and when I arrived I said are you looking for a salesman, he said yes, take off your jacket and get behind the counter today is payday...amongst the Blacks it was payday, and I accredited myself, he said you are all right, and I said how much do you pay, he said £5 a month I nearly dropped, I took my jacket and walked back to the station, I don't know how many miles I walked and I took the train and I came back to Johannesburg late, then I heard that there was a job going in Bramfontein, I went out to Bramfontein for the job, yes, oh yes, get in behind the counter I want to see what sort of man you are, I got in I packed up the trousers nicely, the shirts nicely, I already had a knack of doing it, and he says yes I'll give you twelve pounds a month but I've got to share the accommodation with him there was just a room at the back of the shop...I did not like his method of instruction, that when a Black man comes from the mine and he buys something you must give him irregular change...I said thank you and I took my jacket and I walked, he chased me and he said what is the matter with you, he said I want to talk to you come back, I came back and I said you know that is a hell of a thing to do, I felt it is not an honorable thing to do, so he looked at me and he says you are a very, very good man. I know you, I even knew your family...I said you know my family, he says yes I do, and I worked for him for I think eight months or nine months and he paid me £17 already not £12 and he wanted me to stay but I wasn't very happy in that job with that first episode that happened between him and me. He tried everything in the world to keep me, so I came back and I had this Mrs. Sacks was a wonderful, wonderful person to me...I said I'll go to the diggings because Kasriel my elder brother was already on the diggings, I came to the diggings and I was looking for a job and I got a job from a Mr. Levy, the Blacks used to call him "Mamenomen" (Fat man) he was very corpulent, and I worked there for

a while on the diggings in the shop and then I was made a proposition to build a bakery, his name was Snake Sipolitsky and without any money investment I just had to work so I cannot remember the financial position of the bakery, I think I used to earn better than in the shops, but it was the hours that were killing, you had to be up about two, three in the morning with the bread, with the boys,

EH

Did they teach you how to bake

JJ

I did not bake, I used to be selling the bread, we had a horse and cart, we used to bake bread puddings, a big loaf of bread which you could divide into ten or twelve tickey lines or sixpenny lines, you used to just break and we used to sell it to the shops, go around to all the diggings and come back in the afternoon, but in the afternoon you had to go to Lichtenberg to fetch flour, and I think we were the first firm to buy a four cylinder truck, and there were a lot of nice yiddishe boys there, a lot and in the bakery we made a kind of a eating place for all the bachelors ...they had to pay in a pool and we would buy the meat from late Perlman the butcher and Lasky was also a member of the gang and we used to take at least twelve pounds lamb chops or mutton chops, put it in the pudding pans in the bakers oven, in the bakery and we used to fry it, bake it, and we always had plenty of Matels brandy, we drank only Matels brandy

EH

Tell me all the Jewish boys were they working in the shops of the diggings

JJ

Some were digging, quite a few were digging, some had their own businesses a lot of bachelors, some of them had wives...we used to take the lorry, we used to load up hides, wet hides from the butchers store or empty petrol drums and take it into Lichtenburg and bring back a load of flour for the bakery, and one day I passed by, I think it was somewhere in Rustenberg and the husband came up and he said Joe, he was a client, do me a favour take my wife into Lichtenberg, she has got to catch the train to Johannesburg, I said sure, and I picked up that lady and we were travelling towards Lichtenberg and the steering wheel broke loose and she told me that she was pregnant, got off the lorry and I had a look, the rod was broken so what could I do, I took off the belt from my pants and I got underneath the lorry and I tied up somehow the steering wheel and we managed to crawl in to Lichtenberg...there in Lichtenberg I saw a Mr. Morris Kruger, they had a mill, charming fellow had a little two seater Ford and I said Morris I'm in trouble, here is the lady and I've got to take her to the train and the train is gone or is leaving he said don't worry I'll take her to Coleen and she will take the train in Colleen, so he took the lady in his car, he took her to Colleen and her time

was exposed, and the story goes that he took her to his house and she gave birth to a son in the passage of his house...this son that was born is today one of the biggest men in South Africa in property business, one of the biggest men in Johannesburg, one of the biggest in the country...I don't know him I've not met him, but I see so much about him in the press

EH

So you used to buy the flour and take it to the bakery

JJ

Take it back to the bakery and bake bread...until I joined the family

EH

You mean your brothers

JJ

Yes my brother my late brother Kasriel and my ex brother-in-law, we brought them out from Russia, my late sister and her husband we brought out, Kasriel and I we brought them out, then all of us brought out Harry and late mother just like this, a chain reaction...and subsequently I took charge of a shop and a butchery on a place called Hendricksdull, it belonged to African European Investment Company, Lewis & Marks, an old yiddish firm, and we had a concession from them; so we started selling Shell and Vacuum paraffin grease and I used to buy meat from some wholesale butcher in Lichtenburg or Graffentstein

EH

Sorry did you save up enough money to buy this concession store

JJ

You didn't need money, I was working in it, we were given a little bit of credit by a firm called Rosenberg Wholesalers and we were given some credit of petrol and paraffin, we used to pay from day to day and I used to manage the shop and the butchery with the help of one or two black boys...we had very interesting neighbours, the Dorf Brothers from Klerksdorp, there was late Louis and his brother, I think he passed away now in Johannesburg, I've forgotten his name, he gave himself a kind of an English name you know, nice boys, they became very wealthy, very big farmers, very big storekeepers, there were lots of boys, there were some landsleit on the diggings too, the Lurie Brothers, Dattners, Sklars, there were lots of yidden there

EH

Did you work such long hours there too

JJ

Oh yes, I mean you worked from sunrise to sunset, what else can you do

EH

There was not much social life

JJ

No, the only social life you had was to go into Lichtenburg to look for a girl to go to a cinema, and there were regular Church services on a Sunday night by the N.G. Kerk, I used to go and listen very very often, yes I used to go and

listen to sermons, naturally when the prayers were on, I knew the time, I would go and listen to the sermons, a sermon has never done anybody any harm, sermons are always good, disregarding the language, I was on Hendricksdal, Harry was on another farm, and late Kasriel and Sarah and my ex brother-in-law were also on another farm, we had three shops and a butchery...my late sister and Kasriel they had a shop and a fruit shop to keep it open at night because there was nothing else to do...subsequently Harry couldn't take the life and he disappeared he ran away, he went to work for Hechter and Davidovitz, I don't remember where it was, and the catastrophe came when the diamond prices went to blazes, a carat or diamond, they used to pay £2 or £3 a carat, they started paying £1 and chips, the little ones, very small diamonds were ten shillings a carat, so naturally business dropped. Diggers who you used to give credit to couldn't afford to pay, and you had to pay your creditors, so we couldn't pay, found it difficult...the family had a meeting and they decided to pay everybody...we took all the goods, the stock that we had and we took it round to shops on the diggings, and we sold stock for as low as five shillings in the pound, two and sixpence in the pounds just to pay everybody, we paid everybody. One interesting thing was between the oil companies to whom we owed most of the money, everybody got paid every cent, and in 1931 we had no alternative than to leave the diggings...we sold out everything just for nothing, we gave it away and we came to Pretoria. In Pretoria we had a relation, family by the name of Shapiro

EH

Is that why you went to Pretoria, because you had relations

JJ

I remember the arrival in Pretoria, all of us, Harry was gone, late Kasriel and late Sarah, my ex brother-in-law and myself, so somehow or other it became known to us that a good place to make a living was Lady Selborne location. We went out and we saw a stand, I think Mrs. Shapiro must have helped us a great deal and we bought that stand and we went into Pretoria and we went to see a moneylender and he said he would lend us some money and it took in no time we put up a house and shop and a butchery

EH

In the location

JJ

In the location, Lady Selborne Location, and we all worked, we were supposed to be in partnership, the licences were in my name...now they used to buy the meat from the cold storage, little by little, they were very cautious in giving credit. One day I went into town and I asked them haven't they got a job for me. The man I spoke to was the late Mr. Max Jaffe, not Joffe, he was a red haired, ginger face, he was the sales manager of the cold storage. He said Joffe we are firing people, we don't hire people, times are bad. I realised that I've got to get out because there wasn't enough for all of us to do

so one day he came out to the location, he said Mr. Joffe I've got a job for you. Come in tomorrow. I rode a bicycle from Lady Selbourne Location to town, and he says to me, look there is an insolvent butchery, it is an Indian butchery, he owes us money and I'll give you a job as a bicycle delivery boy ...after I tried this job, it was some painstaking business, I had to ride the bicycle from (inaudible) to Sunnysdale Street in Pretoria. I had a basket containing about 80 or 90 or more pounds of meat, various orders, and this was a daily procedure until the Indian reinstated himself in the butchery for a short period and I was given notice. The first packet I received as salary was for several days at the rate of £2 a week. I remember getting it from the paymaster who was a Mr. van der Skyve, he was an unfortunate man to have one leg and he walked on crutches, my pay was something a pound and a few pence, so I had to get a job...I went to the big boss and I told him I must have work, so he told me that they have a butchery in Pretoria West, and I must start on Monday. I started the butchery, it was mainly European order trade and I was not up to the standard of city blockmen, so I made a few phew paxs in the butchery until we took stock and there was a gross loss of a few pounds. I was called to the office and he said Mr. Joffe are you also stealing my money. I said No Sir I'm not, but I am a little bit generous with your meat to try and get clientele, I said, but if you will have patience for another two three weeks you will find it in order. He said, good, and funnily enough in three weeks time I started showing a profit in the butchery I was duly promoted to the biggest butchery at that time belonging to the company which was showing heavy losses, and I fixed that up, and I was subsequently made manager of the retail butcheries, and from thereon I became a traveller, and after being a traveller for perishable products I became an assistant service manager to Mr. Max Jaffe who originally gave me the first job. I have learned a great deal of practical and practical experience and theoretical experience from my boss Mr. Ivan Ventzle, who I think was a real commercial genius in South Africa but so few people knew about him...he was unreal, very rigid, very hard but a brilliant mathematician, economist and financier, subsequently I have worked with Mr. Ventzle and I resigned and I tried something else but it wouldn't work until Mr. Jaffe came to me from Bloemfontein where he was manager, and he told me Mr. Davies wants me back anywhere as long as I'm back with the trust. Now Port Elizabeth branch was open for a manager so it was the decision of Mr. Max Jaffe, he goes to Port Elizabeth, I become manager in Bloemfontein, or he stays in Bloemfontein and I go to Port Elizabeth. In turn I met a young lady in Bloemfontein, a very lovely Jewish girl and it was a bit of a love story and I wanted to marry her and her father said that my salary wasn't enough for her chocolate bill a month, the only way I could marry his daughter would be if I had my own business

I resigned my job and I went to Vryburg where I was made a proposition by a very prominent Jewish gentleman who subsequently did not keep his word to the arrangements we had made

EH

How did you come to know of it, did you have any contacts

JJ

Vryburg, I had my younger brother Harry and he was the agent, the go-between the man and myself ...I was terribly upset because we got married and it didn't pan out the way we wanted it to so I decided after twelve months to try my own luck in business, starting from zero with a loan of £192 from a lady, a non Jewish lady, and I hired a shop for £8 a month and I bought up about £25 of stock in second hand furniture, a few mattresses, a few chairs

EH

Did you know anything about furniture

JJ

Nothing

EH

So how did you come to do furniture

JJ

Because the girl, my ex-wife's family were in the business and I had friends in the furniture business and it was about the easiest thing to go in with the minimum capital, for everything else you needed cash, so we had a drinking session with the manager of the Standard Bank and he told me lad if you need money you come to me, so I came to him, he didn't deny that I could have all I want but I said I want £300 overdraft, he said on what, I said on nothing, he said you can't have it so there was a hell of a palaver, he said he will give me £200, I said no I want £300, so he says why £300, I said I've got to go to Johannesburg I've got to buy furniture, second hand furniture from sales, I said I've got to transport it to Johannesburg station, I've got to rail it, I've got to pay railage in Vryburg and I've got to have a little bit over for liquidity, he said he will give me £250, I said no...he gave me £300, how he did it, I think at that time the maximum he was allowed to give was £500... however it was the beginning, I started the business on 12th January 1938 and at the end of June I showed a profit of £512 ...I had a bookkeeper used to charge me £5 a month, the late Mr. Jack Cohen, he didn't believe the story but he came up, he says you know something personally I think you are bankrupt and I'm not charging you for this month's work but get yourself somebody else I'm not doing the work any more, it's impossible that you should make yourself £512 profit, however, I found bigger premises and I moved over and started progressing, then the war broke out and I joined the Kimberley Regiment ... I had a wonderful lady working for me, her name was Mrs. Granding and I had an Afrikaans man working, his name was France Veed, however, after joining

the Kimberley Regiment I went to Johannesburg...I got a bit of stock, second hand furniture, new furniture ...so I did not know what my fate was going to be, so I decided to make out a Will in favour of my late mother and I could only do so by coming back and offering the man Mr. Veed...she should inherit whatever there is, I said Mr. Veed I'm offering you a full partnership in the business without having to invest a cent and you and Mrs. Grant will run the business, he said I've got news for you to, I'm giving you notice on the turn..with the same view in the event of anything happening my mother would be sole beneficiary and she can do what she likes, give it to the children in Israel and so on, so I went to Sonderwater, I was boarded as a C3 soldier and I had five operations, mainly on the head and sinusitis in Johannesburg, and they said either I do clerical work or I have my discharge, so I got my discharge and I came back to Vryburg, and naturally there were bad days, and I started concentrating on farming and farming and cattle and business, I worked very, very hard and thank God I was very successful, starting from nothing, I wasn't used to big money but I did make good, we lived very well, very comfortably and it was a good life

EH

Right now I know about your work. Now I want to ask you a few questions about religion. You lived mostly in Vryburg, did you belong to a shul

JJ

In Vryburg, we all belonged to the Liberal Congregation. I was on the Committee we were one of the most prosperous, closely integrated Jewish communities in South Africa, we were high up in contributions, we used to go out for collection we had lots of collections in various ways, we used to appeal to farmers, non Jewish farmers, to assist us, they gave us cattle, livestock which was sold on the stock fairs in favour of our congregation, and when it was the IUA fund, we used to collect non Jewish farmers as well as Jewish...we had lots of Jewish farmers who were married to ladies of other faiths, and they gave very liberally and we had a wonderful congregation and when I lived there there were about 36 to 38 families, we imported a rev from Israel and his wife and he was under contract to us for about 3 or 5 years

EH

What was his name

JJ

(Unintelligible)

EH

Does not matter, was there a shul already established

JJ

There was a shul and a hall...Rabbi Slonim, when I arrived he came from Israel he came from a wonderful religious family in Jerusalem...his wife had a sister and his wife's sister married Merry Walter, and Rabbi Slonim was the essence of a most wonderful, wonderful human being, he was not the money grabber

money meant nothing to him, like a real proper Israeli chaluitz, money was nothing, brandy was more important, and he and I were the main workers at the Chevra Kadisha in Vryburg. My younger brother was President of the Chevra Kadisha, I was vice-president, and we had to do all the work ourselves, it was not very often but you know from the district there were a few yidden, and we had to do all the work ourselves willingly knowing that it's a mitzvah and we did it well.

EH

How many Jewish families were there at that time

JJ

About 38 families

EH

Were they all religious

JJ

Well they had ...they were all good yidden, they all meant well, if they did not come to shul we knew that Saturday was impossible to come to shul because everyone was in business, but Friday nights we had a wonderful minyan and for a number of years I used to daven erev Shabbat, Mincha and Ma'ariv, then we got Rabbi Slonim, he passed away, that was a big tragedy in our lives in Johannesburg and I was very, very sorry about it because he wrote to me one letter, I went to see him in General Hospital, he wrote to me again and I was a little bit slow in coming, I couldn't make it and he passed away. Then we imported a rabbi from Israel with the name of Yeshou Kimmelman, he was about 21 and his wife Saba was about 17 and he made fantastic progress with the Congregation and particularly with the children. We were very, very happy with him. We gave him a house, we built a house and he lived happily until the Potchefstroom congregation decided to take him away from us, so there is some old stupid Shulchan Orach Law, where it comes from I don't know, they would not come to talk to him in Bryburg but they asked him to meet them on the Veringeen road...there was a Mr. Shulman from Potchefstroom who came to negotiate, and when Rabbi Kimmelman, came to tell us that he was being offered an enormous salary in Potchefstroom, we felt we did not want to stay in his way and he went. Since that day we have been struggling...within a matter of a few months he made a choir for the children, and I want to tell you it was the pleasure of the week to go on Friday night to shul and to listen to him daven, he had a lovely voice, and the children...subsequently I decided that the children should take over the service on Friday night, which was done. Every child in turn used to daven maariv on Friday night, and the attendance was always good...and yet we had such a wonderful congregation, it was out of this world...we have over 100 people for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and we had a rabbi, we had unpleasantness with rabbanim...some were good, some were not good at all and some did stupid things and we had to buy out their contracts

to get them out of Vryburg, they were not good enough for us, but we managed to struggle on and on and the community started to disperse, children grew up, matriculated, higher education, families followed...we had every Sunday night we had a game of cards, all the proceeds would go to the congregation or some benefit cause, we had markets we had once a year open markets, we had dances organised, we had to fight for it to have the cafe at the stockfairs in Vryburg and the Jewish ladies feed was very very popular amongst the cattle buyers and sellers and particularly all the Blacks working there, they could not wait for a Jewish ladies Friday sale because they would get twice as much in weight for value for tw half the price in money, it was good and good until such time as the community became smaller and smaller and smaller and we could not keep up a rev any more so Max Cohen, my brother Harry used to daven musaf and crea and I used to daven Shachrit Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur...it was good until we had to follow the children and we were leaving Vryburg, naturally very much upset about it, and the congregation had been informed that there was an amount of money left for a specific purpose by a South African Jewish Springbok rugby player...Fred Smellen or Mr. Smellen I dont remember ...he was a famous rugby personality in South Africa, and I think he left £5000

EH

Did he live in Vryburg

JJ

Yes he left it for a specific purpose, only for a shul to be built, but nothing else, just for a shul, unfortunately we had a beautiful hall cum shul we had built a beautiful oren kodesh and I managed to get the man that worked for me, Mr. Veet to carve the Oren Kodesh, made a beautiful job of it and we could not get the £5000 because it was left solely with the idea of having the shul, so my committee members went to the Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg and to the best of my knowledge Advocate Maisels was approached on the subject and he managed to negotiate with the Master of the Supreme Court that we should get the interest which would help the congregation which I believe was agreed (end of tape) and I promised faithfully I would come to their son Brad's barmitzvah...I want to tell you I travelled to Kimberley I flew to Kimberley specially to attend the barmitzvah, there were only five four families left...the shul cum hall is kept in beautiful condition but services are not held any more, they have got no minyan...only during the holidays when a few visitors come and the children come that they might have occasionally a minyan...now the rabbi Cooperman from Kimberley came to officiate the barmitzvah, it was such an eye opener to me, from all over we were approximately twenty five or thirty yidden altogether and there were about 200 non Jewish people. The shul was crowded, there were no seats left only standing room and he translated the entire service from Shachrit till

the end of the barmitzvah, he is an Irish Jew he comes from Salisbury, a very very fine rabbi, charming man, and I want to tell you that will shake you, that it was all kosher, everything was kosher, it is just unbelievable, he insisted on kosher...I dont know the cost to this barmitzvah, but Isaac had to send a lorry to Johannesburg to bring a tent a marquee, they brought the marquee, they put it up, he hired furniture and Boyke Rollef did all the decorations, electric lights were put in, the food was so fantastic, I can not single out the best hotel in Johannesburg or Cape Town who could supercede the catering of that day, nobody, impossible, I have never seen such luxury feeds presented, there was no shortage of refreshments neither, plenty of everything, and the boy did very well...I was honoured, I was given an aliya, the only one, the Cohen, the Levy and the Israel in the morning and the boy, I was astonished that the boy read fluently from the Torah, he read it beautifully...it was fantastic to see how four families can keep up a congregation...what they do now is they have amalgamated with Mafeking, and in Mafeking they have got this wonderful man Jack Fish, so they all go for yomtov, for Rosh Hashana Yom Kippur they go to Mafeking and Mafeking has got more families than Vryburg and they've got a lot of Israelis working for Baputhatswana government, whom I dont know, I've never met them, so they had a big minyan and Mr. Jack Fish puts them all up for free for yomtov, food, hotel, drinks, everything on the house, he is an unreal man, to live, to meet and to know...I cannot talk highly enough Jewish life goes on, Harold Schechter is carrying the lot, Esme Ralph is number two, you know Esme was converted

EH

So most of the Jews who remained in Vryburg are married to gentile women
JJ

Yes, they became all converted, and I want to tell you I am very, very, very proud of them. Now I want to tell you while we are on the subject of Esme that this I think should be on record, Esme Ralph was I think a girl called Potgeiter, a lovely kid. When she married, she went for her lessons in Johannesburg or Kimberley, I dont remember, she became proficient in Hebrew that she taught four boys the entire barmitzvah in Hebrew, and I want to tell you Eve that there were no flaws, and this Esme Ralph should be really commended on such a performance to teach Jewish children the entire ceremony of the barmitzvah without skimping a word. Now this is something in all my life I've never heard and I've never seen and I dont think there will be another one and what she is not doing today...Julie had a leg amputated, she works all day in the shop, she has got three lovely boys, they are Springbok hockey players, they play for Northern or Southern Transvaal, one is in the army, one is an auditor, David is a champion boy. I have not seen them for so many years, I dont know what they look like, but Esme Ralph I would class her as one of the most outstanding personalities in the Jewish annals of our history. She is the greatest, and she just takes it as it comes. She keeps the keys of the shul

shul, she keeps the keys of the Oren Kodesh, she cleans it, she looks after it, so does Marie, they all do their share, and not forgetting Harold's wife what's her name, Zelda, Zelda also helps, they all help, but the meeting is still there of the community, the togetherness is still there and I think they are to be admired. I love them, that's all I can tell you.

EH
Tell me how much would you say religion meant to you as a child

JJ
To me as a child, well, religion meant everything because I was brought up in it, I was born in it, we were a fairly religious kosher family and I still remember the years when I used to daven every morning with Tfillin and so on, and gradually you get out of it when you become assimilated to a foreign life like in South Africa, you know gradually you move out, you get out of it, but even in my naughty years when I was wild, I was still always thinking of my yeshiva days, those few years, the little while I was there, or the cheder and I loved Israel all my life, I've been a Revisionist all my life

EH
Now I want to know about Zionist views, was your family involved in Zionism

JJ
To the best of my recollection, I cannot tell you because

EH
What about your parents

JJ
I'm trying to tell you, my parents that we were so much occupied in making a living, we had no capital, when they left Lithuania they had nothing, we worked up and lost a lot of money in Russia, when we had money it used to run into hundreds of millions so when we left Russia to go back to Lithuania there was nothing that we could take along because it was overnight we run away, so we left everything, so then we came to Ponevez we had to start struggling to make a living, if it wasn't for the cow that we got back from Pompan, we would have starved, but this is the time when we started a little business, so I cannot tell you about Zionism appertaining to my parents because I don't remember...but I joined Maccabi in Ponevez, I was one of the first few, I've got beautiful photographs of Maccabi, and when Jabotinsky came in 1921 I became an ardent follower of Jabotinsky, and I've been a Revisionist ever since and till a few years ago I was on the executive committee of the Western Province Revisionist Society, occasionally I still am, when they need me

EH
What were your activities in Maccabi in Lithuania

JJ
Well it was mainly sport and faithfulness to Zionism, because Maccabi is a division of Zionism

EH
Did you have any speakers or discussions

JJ
Oh yes, we had a lot of people used to come and lecture to us on Zionism, from Kevne, from Shavel, from Velkamier, from Germany, from Austria, oh we had lots of that, but Maccabi stood for one thing, towards a Zionist movement all the years

EH
And when you came to South Africa, did you belong to any Zionist organisation

JJ
When I came to South Africa, there wasn't very much time, when you live out of a city and you've got to work day and night and you don't know the language, it wasn't easy. When I came into Johannesburg naturally I immediately looked for yiddishkeit, I went to the Jewish Guild in Johannesburg and I participated there for a while in everything that was going, everything that was offered

EH
Do you remember any fund-raising campaigns, any speakers that came to South Africa or in Vryburg....any famous people that came for Keren Hayesed

JJ
Yes there were quite a few used to come from Johannesburg

EH
Can you remember any names

JJ
I remember Jabotinsky coming to South Africa

EH
Where did you hear him

JJ
I think it was in Johannesburg in a very big cinema

EH
Was it well attended

JJ
Oh it was crowded...he was one of the finest speakers in the world, then there was a fellow, Dr. Alexander Rosenfield who became subsequently a Maccabi PTO for the Rothschilds, Rothschild used to I believe pay his expenses and he used to travel world-wide for Maccabi and Zionism, but I think everybody who was a big man in Johannesburg in Zionism, I don't remember their names offhand used to come to Vryburg to lecture us, everybody....Rabbonim used to come, Rabbi Duschensky used to come to us

EH
Do you remember any anti Zionists protests

JJ
Anti Zionists protests

Well these were during the beginning of the war, there were some anti Zionist protests, the Zionists were always classed together with Freemasons, always anti Zionists and anti Freemasonry...newspapers exhibitions, there were a few confrontations I believe in Johannesburg or in Cape Town but I don't think it was on a big scale to the best of my memory. We had a few problems during the beginning of the war in anti Jewishness emanating from radio, always the Juden, and the Juden, and the Juden. Now here I must tell you a story that one day a farmer came into my business and he said look here I want to buy a radio from you and on one condition that I can hear what Hitler says about the yidden from Shishon...I'll sell you a radio but what Hitler says is not my business he took out the radio and he brought it back the following day and he said the damn thing is no good...I said what's the matter with it, he said he can't get Shishon on it, I said have a look, he never switched it on, he never switched it on so he couldn't hear, but he says are you a Jew, I said yes I'm a Jew he says why does Hitler hate you, he says you are a good boy, you are a good South African, I said I'll leave this to your better judgement...he was a fine old man and he came back to me a few months later, he's very sorry, he's met so many good people and he does not want a Shishon radio...his name was Mr. Joshua Housebrooke, the grandfather of the family Housebrookes in Florida. It's an interesting episode.

EH

Now they say at that time there were not very many Jewish women in South Africa was it a problem for a young man

JJ

Oh yes...the problem of Jewish women of marriageable type of a woman was a, it wasn't a problem for the South African born boy, but it certainly was a problem for us Lithuanians, a, we didn't know the language sufficiently well b, we were not educated, I had no education at all, ~~min~~ only one year, and the pronounced dialect of mine in English is unirradicable, I mean I did not learn English to know better

EH

Was it a problem

JJ

Yes it was a problem because you are always looked down upon, a greener

EH

So you wouldn't be accepted in society

JJ

But I want to tell you that a lot of us, I think most of us, made good there were cases which were really pathetic, now there was one thing that happened to me, I had a schoolmate of mine in Penevez we used to sleep and drink together in one bed, and he went to South Africa, I came to South Africa, and he became a wealthy man in East London and I couldn't wait to see him when I came to South Africa...when I came to East London I was on sick

leave from the army in uniform, naturally when we met it was something... brotherly love ...he did not know what to do for me, he offered me a car a driver, petrol, coupons, everything, and he said Friday night you are coming to my house...I'll come and fetch you at the hotel and we will have a real celebration. I was in the hotel having a few drinks with Harold Schechter late father, it was his hotel, I think it was called Cumberland, we had another drink, we had a third drink, we had a fourth drink...nobody comes to fetch me suddenly he arrives and he is crying...I said Vannie why are you crying, what happened, what's wrong...I'm sorry to have to tell you that my wife does not want to entertain you, you are a Russian yid, you know I never met his wife, she is a lady whoever she is, I nearly dropped, it took him hours to go home he did not want to go home but he went home and I never visited his house, that's a fact to give you an idea on the question you just asked about greener...an isolated case that happened to me in my life...you know thank God I never took his car, I never took his petrol, but I visited his office on quite a few occasions until I had to leave East London...would you believe that, she did not want to entertain a Russian boy, a Russian Jew ...that is something to think about, it can happen, it happened

EH

Tell me did Jewish males spend time with gentile girls

JJ

Oh yes of course, we ate with them, we slept with them, I mean you have got to live a natural life

EH

What about Coloured girls

JJ

There was no necessity, I mean if I lived in Cape Town I would not know the difference between a Coloured girl or a European girl, I see some of them I can't tell the difference today, so what difference would it have made in those days...I wasn't a bad looking specimen of humanity, I played all kinds of games I was almost versatile excepting in academics ...I could ride a horse as good as anybody else, I could play soccer, I could swim, I played golf, I played tennis, I was accepted, only with the greatest respect in life without any regrets

EH

Do you remember many Jews marrying out of faith

JJ

Yes of yes

EH

Was it frowned upon, was it accepted

JJ

Look you see the thing is this, it becomes a cantankerous disease intermarriage take a fellow like late Morris Grace, you heard of him, Morris Grace came to

He started off like I did, he was a smous and the family Potgeiters befriended him, they gave him a bed to sleep in, they helped him in business, they helped him to get along, there were two or three sisters, there was Ella and Susie ... lovely girls, Ella was a charming lady whom he subsequently married, and he had no alternative, it became a matter of companionship, he had less education than I think I did, so what do you expect, why not, rather live a normal life and marry a Christian woman ... what Yiddishe girl would like to go and live with a smous in Kutcherdan... could you name one, you couldn't, nor could anybody else

EH

Tell me did you ever hear of a case the parents sat shiva

JJ

Yes I heard something like that on a few occasions, but I think it is carrying it too far, because nobody does it out of spite, I don't know that any couple that got married out of spite to Jewishness or Zionism... I feel a congregation he said with what kind of a heart can I give the money for Israel, I want to give you money, I'll give you a lot of money, which he did, but he said your congregation don't want to help me to get Ella magayid, they are making obstacles... actually it wasn't the congregation, it was the Chief Rabbi of Cape Town who put very difficult obstacles in the way, she was in Kutchedan and he wanted her in Cape Town and details which I don't know what has happened

EH

Do you know who was then the Chief Rabbi in Cape Town

JJ

I don't remember

EH

It wasn't Bender

JJ

No it was after Bender... I don't remember, anyway his big mean was why should he help us, he would rather give the money direct to Israel, but he does not want it to go via the Jewish congregation of Vryburg, so he gave us the money every time we would go out we heard the same thing, the Vryburg Hebrew Congregation did not want to help him and he has already had two children by then and they were accepted in the church, the NG. Kerk and they lived very happily, he died a very rich man, and before his demise he took up the N.G. faith to be with his wife's religion. We also had a case in Vryburg, some many many years ago where we were called to do a burial by a Jew who lived up country and was married to a Coloured lady and the police and the magistrate had discovered that in his Will he had requested to be buried on a Jewish cemetery in Vryburg, and it was a lot of humdrum, it was in the period of December holidays where everybody goes away for December holidays and it was the beginning of a heavy rainy season and we performed the burial on the Jewish cemetery

they never practised Judaism, what religion I don't know, they were fairly well dressed up, well mannered, with respect, and this is one of the cases... but there were lots of these type of yidden who lived in the bundu, in the far away places, I know of many more... the one lived on the road to Kuruman... it is difficult to tell who he lived with, whether he cohabited with a Coloured, or a non Jewess... it is difficult to tell, a man must find natural ways out, and if it is not this one, it is the other one... when you live in the bundu and you are ostracized from families, from congregations, from religion, you come once a year to a shul, you don't know what to do any more, for 15 years you never go to shul, so it used to be our duty to go and visit these people, we used to get a lot of money from these people but as far as their personal lives were concerned, we tried to do all we could but there are limits to what you can do and to interfere in grown up people's lives, you can interfere up to so much otherwise if you go too far they tell you to go to blazes, so I imagine there must have been quite a few cases in South Africa because if I can remember two or three cases in Vryburg, so you can imagine there must have been some cases in Kuruman

EH

Do you think it was mostly in small places

JJ

Definitely, in small places. In the cities you people know more than we know I don't think I should talk about cities, maybe I'm not qualified, but I do know what I've seen, in the cities I reckon it is the fault of the parents nobody else's, I feel if a parent does not keep up genuine yiddishkeit and does not give his child proper love with a yiddish heart... like we do our children they do really get yhrm ydysy, yhrtr id do muvh sytsvyion, there is so much competition... the fault of our Jews is that we contribute our stupid lives to moneymaking and we concentrate too much on money, we forget about love and yiddishkeit to our children and therefore subsequently we paid the penalty when our children strayed, this is my honest opinion about this issue

EH

What age were you when you got married

JJ

I got married the first time was in 1937 and we were divorced... no we got married in '38

EH

How long did you know her before you got married

JJ

I knew her for about a year

EH

How did you meet her

JJ

et her - n h tre . ,

I met her at a bus station, she was a lovely girl, a very athletic type of a girl

EH

Where did she come from

JJ

South African born, very fine family

EH

What background, was it East European Jews

JJ

No, Rumanian or Hungarian family

EH

So there was no problem about the background

JJ

No

EH

Were you engaged to her

JJ

Yes I was engaged and subsequently we got married, and we came to Vryburg

EH

Did you save up a bit of money at that time

JJ

Not much money because the first year was absolutely ...but the second year I started doing better and better and then she decided she did not want to stay in Vryburg any more

EH

Where did you get married

JJ

In Bloemfontein

EH

You remember the rabbi

JJ

Yes Rabbi Rem

EH

Did you marry by antenuptial contract or community of property

JJ

Antenuptial contract

EH

Were you consulted, how did you choose it

JJ

I knew nothing about contracts...it was suggested to me that we have antenuptial contract because she was worth a lot and I was worth nothing

EH

So were you quite happy about it

EH

Where did you sign the contract, in a lawyer's office

JJ

I think so

EH

So you divorced in about a year

JJ

Make it twenty months

EH

And how did you meet your second wife

JJ

Well this was really a stupid affair...I decided to get married in Vryburg so I started looking out for Jewish girls, so I quickly ran up about four, the one was an elocution teacher, the one was ...she came from Natal, the other one was a sergeant in the Air Force

EH

A Jewish girl

JJ

Jewish girl, very good dancer

JJ

And the third one was a reverend's a daughter, a mohel, who unfortunately fell in love with me because she had in Muizenberg one drink too many, I put her to bed, I locked her down in her bedroom, and subsequently she told me I saved her life from disgrace, and she loves me and I must come and see her in Johannesburg, and the love developed very heavy. I came to Johannesburg, as you know I'm a man of a few words, I told her I worked in Vryburg, I was already almost prosperous, I said I work in Vryburg, I've got a very good job and a very good income, and that night I saw the family, the whole congregation for tea, and I saw the consensus of opinion was that I was approved we were going out to a show and dinner at the Criterion Hotel and going back we were walking really like a pair of stupid lovers hand in hand, and I said to her look would you be interested to marry me, she said I love you so much but I cannot go away from my Johannesburg, you come to Johannesburg...so when she discovered that I had farms and cattle, I said I'm sorry, too late...then there was another girl who discovered from my late ex wife that I'm not as bad a man as one could be, she arrived in Vryburg, she was a lovely, ~~xxxx~~ lovely lady, she smoked like a chimney and drank magnificently...I want to play golf with you, I said sure, I played golf with her Saturday afternoon, we came back at the hotel and she drank about at least a half a bottle of gin, and she told me that she heard all about me from my late ex wife and she would like to marry me, no nonsense...I said I'm not ready yet, she was a fine golfer. Then I was in Johannesburg at a furniture factory and I met a Mr. Jackow so he offered me a lift to town, I accepted, and he said I'll give you tea, he

he said come and meet my office people, I don't remember there must have been about 8 or 9 girls or 11 girls and this is my chief bookkeeper, I took no notice of her whatsoever, I don't remember what I asked her or what I said to her, she said would you please get out of my office, I said what do you mean, she said get the hell out of it...I was so annoyed I didn't know what to do, I told her boss, I said you know Jack, I love this girl I'm going to marry her...he said you can marry her over my dead body, blah, blah, blah...I said Jack remember what I tell you, I went back to Vryburg, I phoned her up once, I'd like to see you, can I write to you, she said yes she was going on holiday, she sent me snaps, and I came into Johannesburg, she said come and meet my parents they lived in a tiny little room in Katz Street, she used to sleep on the balcony, she was the bread earner of the family. Her father worked, he was the manager of a big wholesale woolen merchants, that gentleman used to take the enormous salary of £10 a month...I tell you, you talk about antisemitism I could cry about it...£10 a month, he used to wear a suit and get dressed immaculately, shave himself and bath every morning, have a brandy at night all this for £10 a month (end of tape) I said to them tell me would you object if I would like to marry your daughter, they never said anything, the old man said, have a brandy that was the beginning

EH

Where did she come from

JJ

Her father was born in Cheapend Street, London, her mother also comes from England but her mother is not her mother, she was a stepmother, Lilia was I think two years old when her mother died

EH

Now her father was from England, was there no problem ...you were Eastern European Jew, he was English

JJ

No, no, there was a good attachment between us, it worked like a dream, and he was very charming, really he was a hell of a nice old chap

EH

How long were you engaged to her

JJ

About 18 months or something like that

EH

And this time did you also sign antenuptial contract

JJ

Yes

EH

Did you decide on the antenuptial contract

JJ

I don't remember, these things never meant much to me

because I have parted by now with about 95 percent of my worth, there were two children and I provided for Lilia and when I go I will be a rich man, not that I'm rich today

EH

But you are quite contented with this contract that you signed

EH

Where did you live when you got married

JJ

Well we lived in Vryburg most of our lives

EH

Could you describe the wedding

JJ

I think our wedding was a riot because she was from Johannesburg and I was from Vryburg, the wedding was in the City Hall in Johannesburg...September 1951 we got married

EH

Which shul did you get married

JJ

In Wolmarans Street shul and we had my going away place was in the house of a Mr. Hymie Dettner in Johannesburg, and people travelled from all over the country to the wedding, one fellow travelled about 600 miles with an arm in plaster, Johannes de Klerk...and I had a bottle store, my brother and I in Vryburg, so we provided all the liquor, you should have seen how well off people from Johannesburg took bottles from the tables into their coat pockets we had an orchestra, we had a singer, we had a record made of the wedding, the best man was Dr. Simon Heffman, he is now a big deal in Israel, and Rabbi Kimmelman proposed the toast of the chosen kalla, I've got it on record, it is fantastic

EH

Did you have a honeymoon

JJ

Yes we had a honeymoon

EH

Where did you go

JJ

We went to Durban by car, I bought a beautiful car, a big Ford car, and then we put the car on the "Edinburgh Castle" and we travelled to Cape Town, we arrived Yom Kippur morning, the ship was late, bad weather, and we stayed with some very nice, very religious Jewish family called Gordon Jaffe and his wife in Kenilworth and I went to a shul I think in Claremont and I sat between late Advocate Bobby Bloch and Mr. Wolf Heller and I enjoyed the service immensely and we spent a few weeks in Cape Town and we motored back

to Vryburg

EH

Now did you have a house

JJ

At that time we had a flat and soon after I bought a house

EH

Did your wife, you mentioned that she worked before she got married, did she work afterwards

JJ

No she did not work in Vryburg

EH

How many children do you have

JJ

I have two children

EH

Could you give me their names and years of birth

JJ

Noelle Sandra, she is our daughter, she is now 31 and Morris Peter Jaffe is 28 going on for 29, he is in Boston, he is with the Higher Regency Hotel group, he is director of catering in Boston and the reason why he is named Peter is very interesting story, we had an attorney once Peter de Kock, he was a member of parliament for the United Party and he helped me through ~~think~~ thin and thick in life he used to swear at me so much but evidently he must have liked me to some degree that he helped me, I wanted to buy a farm and we had no money and he told me you better go and sell chairs or a mattress and one day I hammered him, and he says go and move your bloody cattle to the farm well the first farm we bought we lost so many cattle tracking there, I think we lost about 20 percent of our stock by moving from one farm to another

EH

Were your children born at home

JJ

No born in Vryburg, she was the second child born in the new hospital and Morris was born in Johannesburg

EH

When you got married did you give your wife an allowance or did she just take money whenever she needed

JJ

She used to draw whatever money she wanted...she could do what she liked, it was carte blanc

EH

When you were the first few years in South Africa did you ever discuss the Cape Board of Deputies, did you know anything about it

I never heard of them

EH

What about Morris Alexander, David Goldblatt

JJ

Yes, yes, Morris Alexander I met in Vryburg...he used to come and talk to us Morris Alexander I knew personally very well...he used to come to us very often because he used to love coming to Vryburg, as I said lots of dignitaries of the type of Morris Alexander used to come, they used to come and talk to us to give us inspiration, talk to us about Zionism, talk to us about the Jewish Board of Deputies, the necessity of the Jewish Board of Deputies, the work that the Jewish Board of Deputies is doing for South African Jewry and all this

EH

Were you involved in communal affairs

JJ

Always involved

EH

What does the Jewish Cape Board of Deputies mean to you

JJ

Today you know I'm getting on in years and a few years ago you might recall I wasn't at all well, so I gradually pulled myself away, a withdrawal, you get lazy, until a few years ago I still attended as a delegate from Cape Town the Zionist Bi Annual Congresses in Johannesburg or in Cape Town wherever it was and always naturally for the Revisionist Party

EH

What does the Jewish Cape Board of Deputies mean to you, does it mean anything

JJ

Oh yes of course it is something that we Jewish people we belong to it, we fall under it, we are under their wings in other words, the thing is God forbid anything happens, immediately we would start thinking I need some help of this type and only body that could assist would be the Cape Board of Deputies

EH

Now do you know if there was any difference in attitude towards communal life within the Jewish community, you know like the Anglo German Jews, did they see communal life different than the greeners

JJ

Well I think yes...I have observed for the years that I've been in South Africa that the German immigrants or the German community were keeping to themselves the English Jewry were keeping to themselves and we Russians kept to ourselves but I do think in all sincerity in case of necessity most of the Jews try to pull for the cause together, I more, one less, one better one worse, but the thing is unless you wish to change your religion for one reason or another you are still a Jew

and it is good to be a Jew, personally I have been tempted so many times for conversion, I was now in Idaho Falls in America, I lived with Mormons, wonderful people and Morris spent a year with that family as a Rotary Exchange Student, do you know there wasn't a week or a day when there wasn't a Mormon coming to try to do something to Morris to try and convert him to Mormonism she says until she kicked him out from her house, this was only told to me 18 months ago in Idaho Falls... you see to this degree, and thank God he is a Jew, he's got such a position that he works like a slave, yet Yom Kippur he's got a chance to go to shul ...it is difficult to make friends when you are working in hotel life, you ~~make~~ meet a lot of people but I think the inclination is there ...I have met from ministers upwards down to myself and I've always been proud to be a Jew, I don't take any insults as a Jew from ...an unintelligent man I will take it but from an intelligent man...from one who hasn't got the understanding that religion is everyone's own personal decision, personal desire, unless you are not proud of your religion...I've got a fantastic story about that, have you got time...there is a terrific young man in South Africa whom I admire so much, he is a qualified Civil Engineer, he may be one of the youngest in South Africa, and he decided to become interested in the Indian cult. I went on holiday in Durban and he was busy on one of the biggest projects in Natal doing the concrete work, and he started off talking to me about conversion, that he would like to Hindu religion and I have a lot of sympathy for him and I said to him, you know I don't want to dissuade or persuade you but maybe it is possible that you do go to India, learn whatever you like...whether one religion is worth so much to forfeit the other religion that you are born in, what would be your religious benefits you would gain from conversion...you know that the first letter he wrote to me was about 24 pages from India, he is becoming...he is doing very well, he is in Australia at the moment

EH

He is a Jew

JJ

Yes what a charming man, what a lovely boy, he said I was right, he admires, he loves and he appreciates he respects the Hindu religion but he stays as a Jew now I respect every body else's religion

EH

Tell me did you belong to a landsmanschaft

JJ

Yes and no. The yes is that when I used to come to a city I was looking up for landsleit, I used to come to Cape Town and I would pick up a couple of Ponevez chevra, they picked me up, come to the hotel, have a few drinks and talk,

EH

But did they have a society

JJ

I believe in Johannesburg they had a Ponevez shul and Iscka Stein, but I never been there I never had time to attend

EH

Tell me about your involvement in political affairs prior to 1939 in this country, were you interested in political matters

JJ

I was politically a very good South African, in other words my affiliation were more towards Nationalism than anything else, but I felt that during World War II at the beginning that it is a very just cause to go and fight nazism so I voted Smuts United Party, and I joined the Kimberley Regiment on that strength

EH

Would you say that the Jewish question affected you for whom you voted for

JJ

It did in that respect, yes, under those circumstances at that time, it did but I today although I've got a lot of comments to criticise the government even today I still feel for South Africa very much, if things would have been viable domestically I would have been in Israel thirty years ago, I love Israel but in South Africa I am a South African

EH

Tell me on the question of antisemitism, did you ever experience any anti Jewish feelings here in this country

JJ

You know that is not a very easy answer. I had experienced sometimes degradations that I wasn't up to this, I wasn't up to that, I wasn't up to this club

EH

Were you actually made to feel, felt

JJ

Yes, oh yes it happened a few times. I don't know if I've told you that I've been a Freemason for over 40 years and that's a very fine society, you do travel a lot when you are in Freemasonry, you see quite a lot more than one expects in life and out of life but I had experienced, once we were going to play golf in Johannesburg ...for of us, we did not know that they don't want us on that golf course, we did not know they did not take Jews there, and the secretary came up and he says eh you boys, don't dig up our fairways, when he said hey you I felt that he meant hey you Jew boys, so I wanted to walk off that golf course at that moment but the boys said ah to hell with him, we paid already the money let's play

EH

What about in business in the country

JJ

So seldom did we have any kind of antisemitism, not in my case, maybe somebody else has much more to talk about it

EH

Now you know that in the 1920s there was a strong movement to exclude the Eastern European Jews, this led to the Quota Act in 1930, now why do you think this was so

JJ

I think not knowing a lot about it, it could have come from the hard working and the competitive because when they came to South Africa we are hungry for money for work for establishing ourselves, to get somewhere in life having the knowledge that you've got families behind you that depend on you, illness, parents, sickness and all this, so you don't look at the watch, you carry on and on disregarding whereas other people would work from 8 to 3 or 8 to 4 or 8 to 5 and they finish for the day, I used to carry on working because I was a smous, I was a hawker, a traveller, I did not have any hours...I don't know the real political reason why I believe this was when Dr. Malan was the Minister and I think it could have been some kind of a feeling, it was just on my arrival, I wasn't established in any way and I didn't have time to become interested in anything like that

EH

I just want a few questions here about relations between the Anglo German Jews and the East European Jews, was there much socialising, where you lived were there any Anglo German Jews because you lived mostly in the country, or were the majority mostly Eastern European

JJ

Most of them for arguments sake in Vryburg, their roots were all Eastern European Jews, there could have been one German perhaps of German descent and there could have been a couple of English descent, I found the English Jewry more easily approachable than the German Jews in South Africa, I saw the same thing in Israel, I see the same thing in America

EH

Was it acceptable for a greener to marry an Anglo German Jewess

JJ

This was a case as far as I was concerned...but I feel that sincerity and honest fidelity

EH

When you came to this country did they mix did they intermarry the German Jew and the Eastern European Jew

JJ

I tried always to keep away from German Jews because they always tried to prove superiority and I did not like it, I don't like it today, it maybe because I'm stupid, because I'm ignorant that I don't know better

EH

Now tell me most Eastern European Jews learnt English rather than Afrikaans why do you think that was so

JJ

No who says so, I don't believe that, look I learned...I lived for 42 years in the bundu and my Afrikaans is 40 percent better than my English

EH

So would you say that in the country the Jews learned Afrikaans

JJ

So you know that Lila started talking to me in Afrikaans in Vryburg already you become assimilated, you can't help it, you live with them you work with them day and night 365 days a year

EH

Was there much socialising between Jews and English speaking gentiles

JJ

Not much

EH

And what about Afrikaanse speaking gentiles

JJ

More, much more, more between Jews and Afrikaners

EH

And dating gentiles

JJ

Oh yes I never felt inferior

EH

Now what about the Jewish attitude towards Blacks Coloureds and Indians when you were young

JJ

This naturally to me is the sole responsibility in my whole life, having known the "nagiyka" what you call in Russian the whip of my young days, having seen how my late mother had to kiss that man's hand, and having had a knock on the head when the Russian prince passed by and having been shaved in a camp in Baranovich by the Germans and having degradations, you know we have been degraded, looked upon us as not a nice tribe, without a shadow of a doubt my feelings are for a better life for the Blacks, Indians, Coloureds disregarding all of them

EH

What about when you came to this country was there much socialising with these groups, with the non white groups

JJ

Yes I socialised a lot with Indians and the few Coloureds that were in Vryburg and I had some very fine native Black people as friends inasmuch as only once in my life there was a chief at Glen Red this is outside Vryburg

that he asked the native commissioner to invite me to a very big celebration it was the installation and the Minister for Native Affairs, he was a very big fat man, Dr. de Wit I think, he came to attend and I had a full invitation I sat on the dias with them and naturally the Black people celebrated, there must have been forty, fifty thousand

EH

Now would you say that the Jews shared the same attitudes towards these non white groups as to any other white gentiles

JJ

I think that 100 percent of the Jews that I know, a hundred percent, if there are some I would not like to know them or talk about them, they were all sympathetic, very favourably...the thing is if you want to do something physical in support for these people than you must stand up and speak and be counted

EH

Yes but in these days, before the war were the Jews treating or socialising the same way about the non whites as any other white gentiles

JJ

This is something of the most perturbing answer and question to define, you come and you participate in success of the innocence of the other people who have not got the right, and this is equally a guilt which we must accept as a Jew or a gentile or whoever you are that we have been making money from all those people who absolutely work for us for salaries, for incomes which were absolutely minor, absolutely stupid, and we naturally

EH

Did you have a domestic servant

JJ

Yes

EH

Did she eat together with you

JJ

We had a domestic servant, Johanna Mcherosa, for about 23 years one, we had lots of others...we had on many occasions asked her to eat with us, but she declined for the reason that she would make her own food and she did not want to bring her food at our table, our food was not good enough for her, it had to have their flavour, that was her way, and I want to tell you something, she only left us about 2 years ago, she is not well, she is an elderly person, we helped her build a house in her stadt, Lila is sending her a pension, she is paying her R20 a month, we got her a government pension, she gets about four or five 77 parcels a year from Lila, all goodies, clothing, cloth, bedding, what Maurice is sending to her only God knows, he writes to her more than he writes to his mother...when she came here the last time when Lila was sick, she slept here, and she bathed here and she ate here and so on

EH

EH

In your early years, did you treat domestic servants differently to gentiles

JJ

I personally would say they were all the same or better

EH

In what way would you say that

JJ

I think due to the fact that we have had very hard lives knowing what it is... there is one thing I want to tell you on our farms we both, Harry and I, we used to give our labour better than the normal paid salaries and twice as much in the way of rations until one day I was asked by the farmers Union, a senior member, why do you do that, I said its my money, its my business, its my farms I do what I like because it came winter we would give boots, we would give blankets, we would give heavy military coats, we would give caps instead of half a bag of mealie meal, we would give a full bag of mealie meal, we provided meat, we always gave vegetables, sugar, tea, coffee, admittedly the remuneration could have been much higher, should have been much higher but that is the pattern of life that you lead, that you worked with

EH

Thank you