

Interview with Lance Bell

for the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society

(Participants: Noel H. Pugach interviews Lance Bell)

Noel: Today is Wednesday, March 14, 2018. I'm sitting with Lance Bell, in the History Department Common Room at UNM, and we're going to talk about the Bell family and their business activities, their involvement in the Jewish community, and B-a-r-m-a-n.

Lance: Yes.

Noel: And where was your mother born?

Lance: My mother was born in Birmingham, Alabama and her parents were immigrants from Russia and Poland, and they came to Montgomery, Alabama. And my father was born in Espanola, New Mexico, and his parents, my paternal grandparents, came from Lithuania and Romania.

Noel: All right. Now, do you know the date of birth of your father?

Lance: Yes, I do. My father was born on September 2, 1925, and I know for a fact, he was not born in a hospital. He was born in the home in Espanola. And my mother was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on December 17, 19--

Noel: When did she come to New Mexico and to come to the United States? So, who was the first on your father's side of the family?

Lance: So, my father's from, from what I gather, and this is through recollection, is that there was about nine children that all lived in a little town called Merkine, Lithuania. It was near --

Noel: Do you know the spelling?

Lance: Yes. M-e-r-k-i-n-e, and the Jewish Yiddish name of the town was known as Meretch. Meretch. M-e-r-e-t-c-h. And Merkine, Lithuania is still a town. It's a tourist town today. It's a lovely little town from what I can see in photos.

And I believe out of the nine kids, seven of the kids came to the United States and from what I gather, the first one was Lizzy, and she was Leba's grandmother. Leba --

Noel: Fried.

Lance: Fried. Leba Fried Pierce's grandmother. And I believe, I don't know why or how, they ended up in Colorado, but they ended up in Colorado. And as one sibling came, the others followed. My grandfather, Morris, he -- Moishe was his Yiddish name,-- he came with his brother through the port of Baltimore. And I don't have the name of the boat in my head, but I do know the exact boat they came in on, in my notes.

Noel: What year did he come?

Lance: I believe he came in 1906, around that time.

Noel: Okay.

Lance: 19 -- early 1900s. And that -- somehow, so when he got to the United States, he came where his other siblings had been first, and that was to Denver area, and it could have been Trinidad as well, but in that area of Colorado.

Noel: And do you know anything about your grandfather's level of education?

Lance: No, but I would assume he didn't have any except for grade school education. And I would gather that he and all his siblings were brought up and he was known by Alter, A-l-t-e-r. Belicer, Belicer is spelled -- I've seen it spelled two different ways: B-e-l-i-c-e-r, and B-e-l-i-t-z-e-r. Belitzer, or Belicer, he was very learned and very religious. So I would assume, and I've seen notes, where my grandfather Morris was taught in that school, but when he came here, they did not have any other education.

Noel: Do you know if they had any connection to the Hassidim? Because there's a -- the Belitzer Hassidim?

Lance: No, I don't know. And I've learned -- I've been reading about these rabbis, these famous rabbis in Lithuania and the Gaon of Vilne. I often wonder what my forefathers knew about these famous rabbis, and if they were disciples. If there's not a better word I could think of, of these famous rabbis.

Noel: So, you father comes to the United States, Colorado. How old is he?

Lance: My grandfather came --

Noel: Your grandfather.

Lance: My grandfather came from -- he must have been about 20 years old, is my guess. But I'm not sure.

Noel: Okay. And what did he do when he came here?

Lance: So, I've looked at some of the census reports from back then and they list themselves as either peddlers or merchants. And, I wish I knew exactly what they did, but it seems very similar to other pioneer or immigrant Jewish families that came here. They got connected up to someone else that was a wholesaler, purchased some goods and they took it out in their own wagon to resell them, dry goods. So I don't know what my grandfather did during the, from 1906 to 1916. I'm not sure what exactly happened in that ten-year period. But they had their honeymoon at the Garden of the Gods and --

Noel: Outside of Colorado Springs?

Lance: Colorado Springs, thank you. That's what I was thinking about.

Noel: Okay. And when was the name modified, shortened to Bell?

Lance: So, I don't know. I only wish I knew why they anglicized their name, if that's the right way to put it.

Noel: What was it then, when they were living in Colorado?

Lance: Yes, yes.

Noel: Or in New Mexico?

Lance: Yes, it was done, I think all of the brothers and siblings here, especially in business. But I don't know why or how they chose -- you know, it's obviously shortened from Belitzer to Bell.

Noel: And when they came to New Mexico, they only used the name Bell?

Lance: Yes.

Noel: No documents?

Lance: The only document I have is my grandfather's naturalization papers that says "Morris Belitzer" and he actually, when he, -- and I wish I knew the date of that. That was -- would be helpful. But it does say Belitzer on there, and they spelled it B-e-l-i-t-z-e-r.

Noel: Okay. So, they are in Trinidad, operating various businesses?

Lance: Yes.

Noel: And any other place, or mainly Trinidad?

Lance: At that time, that was it. And I'll list, from my memory, my grandfather's siblings' names. There was Jack Bell. There was Benjamin Bell. There was Barney Bell. There was a sister, Miriam; a sister, Lillian; a sister, Lizzy, who I mentioned earlier was Leba Fried's, and Leba Fried's mother, Marcia's mom. And they were the -- I'm not sure how many number that is -- and then the two siblings that stayed in Europe were females that had married and were doing well enough that they didn't want to give up what they had. Sadly, that was a mistake for them, by staying. And --

Noel: Both died during the Holocaust?

Lance: Yeah. Both died during the Holocaust. Yes.

Noel: Was your father, now your father, I think, was too old to be drafted in World War I?

Lance: Right. My grandfather, so I --

Noel: I mean your grandfather.

Lance: My grandfather was not a veteran. He must have been. I don't know.

Noel: Well, he came at 20.

Lance: Yeah.

Noel: Then he was probably too old to be drafted?

Lance: Yes, he was not involved in the military, I know that for a fact.

Noel: Okay. What language did they speak at home?

Lance: So, they --

Noel: Your grandfather?

Lance: So, my grandfather and I'm going off of what my father told me when I was young. I was 15 when my father died, so just keep that in the back of your mind. They spoke Yiddish for sure, and they spoke English. I was told that my grandfather was hard of hearing, he had some sort of injury. And my dad, I remember him distinctively saying that his father read lips, so we're talking about Morris Bell. He could read lips, but he learned to communicate in Spanish and even in some native dialect with some of the Indians as well.

Noel: Okay, so, what year did they -- your grandfather -- move to Espanola and why Espanola?

Lance: So, I don't know why. But I really think that they wanted to be in a smaller pond, be a bigger fish in a small pond, and although Trinidad was smaller than Denver, but, I think it was a way for them to go onto uncharted territory and be able to establish a shop where other people hadn't as much as they had in Colorado. And why Espanola versus Santa Fe as the original business? I don't really know. I don't know. And so, this was in the 1916-1920 time period we're talking about here.

Noel: You don't know precisely?

Lance: No. They opened the Santa Fe store in 1926. So, I think it's closer to 1920 when they opened up the Espanola store. They probably moved there, you know, as peddlers, where they actually didn't have a brick and mortar store. I was told, and I have writing from my uncle and my father where they actually did have a horse and wagon where they traveled. And this would have been in, you know, the early -- late 19-- , early 1920s. And why Espanola? I don't know.

Noel: And, but they eventually did have a physical store in Espanola?

Lance: Yes, they did.

Noel: And what did they call the store?

Lance: It was, so originally, I believe they called it Bell Brothers Incorporated. And then they changed it to Bell's Stores. And I think when they closed --

when they opened the store in Santa Fe and other stores, that's when they changed the name to Bell Stores or Bell's Department Stores.

Noel: So, you mentioned before I started recording, that they had stores in Grants?

Lance: So, my father told me -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

Noel: Yeah. No, go ahead.

Lance: I know where you're going with your question in terms of what type. So, my father said at one time his family had about 8 or 9 stores, various businesses. And so, I have the lease -- he mentioned, obviously Santa Fe, Espanola, Taos. And I have photographs of those businesses. And then he mentioned Tierra Amarilla, and he mentioned Grants, and he mentioned several stores outside of the main store in Santa Fe. There were maybe other dress shops, etc. And they had a business where they manufactured squaw dresses or fiesta wear called La Rosa de Santa Fe.

Noel: Where did they manufacture them?

Lance: Right in Santa Fe, yes. And so --

Noel: Well, where did they sell them? Only in their own stores? Or are they -- they should be there. They're all over.

Lance: They tried to distribute them. It was not successful with La Rosa and they eventually liquidated all their inventory inside the Bell stores, and they just closed that business.

But I want to get back to your questions about -- so my father said during the Depression era times, the businesses mostly closed, except, -- and this is post-Depression, like in the 30s, -- the businesses mostly closed except for Santa Fe, Espanola and Taos. So, looking at the leases that my grandfather had, and I have of the leases. They didn't ever own property where they had their businesses, unfortunately, I might add. But, one of the stores was called the California store, and I just want to add something before I get back to your question about why Santa Fe. They moved into the Charles Ifeld building at 116 West San Francisco, when they closed their store. They moved directly west. The building right next to them and it was a bigger, way bigger, location than they were in at 114 West San Francisco. So, I would only assume they moved to Santa Fe for more of a community, a bigger city. There was no Jewish institution at that time. They were --

they all met in people's houses, etc. But I think that had a lot to do with it. So, they had enough money and they -- the brothers purchased homes on Don Gaspar Avenue, which is a nice street that leads right to downtown Santa Fe. Directly next door to each other at 720 Don Gaspar, which was my grandfather's home. They built the home. I have the paperwork when they built that home. They paid under \$10,000. I just noticed it sold for \$800,000 for this little house. And then right next door to them at 718 Don Gaspar was Barney's home. So...

Noel: Okay. How many children did your grandfather have? And if you know their names?

Lance: Yeah, so Morris and Ethel, my grandparents, my paternal grandparents, had two sons: Gerald Sidney Bell, who was born in Colorado, in Denver, and my father, Irving Aaron Bell, who was born in 1925 in Espanola. And they had just those two siblings.

Noel: And his brother, how many children did Barney have?

Lance: So, Barney had two daughters. One was named Shirley and one was named Beatrice, and she was known by Bea.

Noel: Okay. All right. So, here they had this general mercantile business in Santa Fe. Bell's store. I assume it's like a little department store, is that correct?

Lance: Yeah, it was interesting because I -- and I'm able to go back in time to get an idea of what the store was like. It was a department store. It was a -- I can't think of what they called these types of stores. In other words, it was a --

Noel: Dry goods?

Lance: Dry goods, thank you. Dry goods. And they had a little bit of everything, so they sold yard goods. They had, you know, ladies' dresses. Shoes, was a big part of their business. They had a men's department. Early on, they were more of a dry goods business. When I grew up, it was more of a department store which you would think of today. Where it was just -- they had no yard goods. It was more modernized. But in the beginning they had toys and yard goods, and men's, ladies', children's wear, etc.

Noel: How did your father get into the business? Why did he decide to go into the business?

Lance: So, my father, Irving --

Noel: What was his level of education?

Lance: He went to Santa Fe High School. Graduated Santa Fe High School when it was downtown Santa Fe. And when he was 18, or maybe even 17, he did not wait to be drafted. He signed up into the army, air force, or Army Air Corps. He enlisted himself and went overseas into World War II. His specific area of, or campaign is I think what you would call it, is the China-Burma chapter of World War II.

Noel: Mm-hm.

Lance: And I have his -- he was awarded distinguished flying cross. He was a sergeant, I believe, not a high ranking but he definitely had a lot of medals, etc. And when he came back to New Mexico, he went to University of New Mexico and got a business degree here, in, -- I guess they called it general management then. And he always loved business. And just like I did, I thought that's what I was going to do too.

But when he came back it was just his mother. My grandfather Morris died in 1945, while my father was overseas. So, he died of a heart attack at around 65 years of age. And so, when he came back, he went into partnership with his mother, Ethel, my grandmother. And Gerald, the brother, went to school, New Mexico State, and got an engineering degree and eventually went to work for Los Alamos Labs. He did not, from what I understand, like the retail business. And so, it worked out that my father and his mother kind of were partners with Barney and his wife, and eventually bought them out. Barney and his wife, Jenny, I think that was her name, Jenny, they bought them out of the business. So, it was just my father and my grandmother running Bell's stores at that time.

Noel: And did he have a large staff, as far as you know?

Lance: Yeah, I think Bell's had, I'm going off of.... You know, the store closed its final year was like February 1984. So, they had -- the employees were a big part of the business. It was a truly family establishment. And on -- I can still see all the time cards. There was 20 to 30 people at one time, working for the Santa Fe store. Because when I grew up, the Espanola store closed and that closed in about 1963 or '4. And the Taos store closed in, I think 1961 is the year that I -- from my recollection. So, it was just the Santa Fe store, and the people that worked there had tenure. I can name

their names, but I won't unless you want, but most of them were there 30 years up, to 50 years.

Noel: That's impressive.

Lance: Yeah, and they stayed. They worked for my grandfather.

Noel: Loyal.

Lance: Yeah, loyal. They worked for my grandfather, saw my father grow up and then they saw my brother Jon and I grow up. They were old, but they were family.

Noel: Okay. Have you had reunions of the employees?

Lance: Yes. I stayed in touch with all the employees and now the full-timers have all passed away. One guy lived to 105 years of age. I stayed in touch with him. He was my dad's good friend. His name was Marvin Lingam. But all the kids and grandkids of all the associates or clerks, as you may call them, I stayed in touch with them all. When they passed away, I saved their obituary and I put them in an album with a history that I have of the store.

Noel: Mm-hm. Okay. Now that history of the store, what does it consist of? Mainly clippings? Or is there narrative?

Lance: It is -- when you say narrative, do you mean --

Noel: In other words, did someone write out a history?

Lance: No. It's mainly that my father didn't write out a history about the store per se. There's some notes that I've given you copies of those memoirs they have.

Noel: A few.

Lance: It's mainly -- they saved everything. So, when we closed the store, there was a full basement and we -- I have this -- I just couldn't toss a lot of things. So, there was paycheck stubs going back to the 40s. And my grandparents' checkbooks. I've shown you some of those things that they have, and ads. I have all the ad books going back to the 40s, 50s. But there was never really a history written about the store. I wish there would have been. So, no, it's just going off of the bits and pieces of history. But many

things have been written about Bell's store, including one article in 1981 or '82, in Rolling Stone magazine.

Noel: Do you have it?

Lance: Yeah, I have it.

Noel: Could you send it to me?

Lance: Yeah, and it was an article about Santa Fe, and they had two paragraphs written about the store.

Noel: Oh. I would like to see that.

Lance: And so --

Noel: Send the whole article.

Lance: Yeah, I can.

Noel: What was the occasion that Rolling Stone picked it up?

Lance: Well, they wrote about Santa Fe and traveling. You know, Santa Fe was hot at that time. And it was just the author's perspective on the town. It was transitioning from small town America to a big tourist -- it was always a tourist town, Santa Fe. But it had kind of, in the late 70s and early 80s, had really transformed into something where the New York Times was writing about it, and they had visitors coming.

Noel: Mm-hm. Right. Right.

Lance: So, the Rolling Stone wrote about Santa Fe, and in the article, it talked about Bell's being a very special place.

Noel: The store was open 6 days a week?

Lance: It was open -- yes, every day but Sunday. And interesting -- so, they were closed on -- my father made it a point, they closed every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And those were the only other days that they closed. And many stores downtown that were owned by Jews in Santa Fe, I recall, were closed on the High Holidays.

Noel: When I first came here, to Albuquerque, the Jewish-owned stores generally closed on Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. And then they stopped.

Lance: Yeah.

Noel: You know? Okay, what was your parents' knowledge of Judaism and what did they observe?

Lance: So, when you say parents, I'm going to also include my grandparents in this.

Noel: Yes, including the grandparents, sure.

Lance: And of course, I'm making some assumptions here. But my grandparents were religious, and I would assume were kosher. Or they did everything they could to try to be kosher, which would have been really hard, unless when they went to Denver and they got meat that way.

Noel: Mm-hm.

Lance: But they had religious prayer books, and I still have those. They had candles where they lit candles and observed Shabbat or the Sabbath. And they bar mitzvahed my father and my uncle although my father never learned Hebrew. I would assume my Uncle Gerald never learned Hebrew. But I found, and they were both bar mitzvahed at their house at 720 Don Gaspar. I found actually the card for my uncle which was probably, if he was born in 1918, so it was like 1931 is my guess. It said, "Please join us for the bar mitzvah of Gerald Bell in our home." So I remember my father telling me he was bar mitzvahed in that house. Who knows exactly what they did, but there's no doubt that my grandparents and my father and his family assimilated.

Yet being Zionists, their love for Israel -- I see from the checkbooks that they had, they were giving money to Jewish causes. They got the Forward Newspaper, and my father, during the establishment of the temple, my father and uncle both were presidents of the temple. And --

Noel: We'll go back to that. Did you father speak Yiddish?

Lance: He didn't. He spoke words. It was kind of like he said, you know, he heard his parents talking in it, but they never really taught him, so he learned a lot of words, but he did not speak Yiddish.

Noel: Okay. So, tell me about your family's connection to Temple Beth Shalom.

Lance: Yes.

Noel: [Inaudible] go to it?

Lance: The Jewish organizations in Santa Fe at that time were obviously Hadassah, B'nai B'rith. They had chapters there. And I would think that those came before Temple Beth Shalom. And I think Temple Beth Shalom was called the Santa Fe Jewish Temple or something --

Noel: It was Center.

Lance: Center, before it was called Temple Beth Shalom. My grandfather had already passed way. My grandmother was alive. In some of the original documents I've seen, I see Marcia Hertzmark, and I see Louis Rubenstein, who was married to Marcia's sister. Her name was Mildred, and they called her Millie. And Gerald Bell, who eventually married Leah Waterman Bell. Then eventually she became largely known as Lea Kellogg with her second husband. They were all involved with the temple. My father was a past president. My Uncle Joe was a president. Leah was a president. They helped, you know, the building was built by a famous architect, John Gaw Meem and they were all involved with building the land and it was a community. They all seemed to get along as far as I know.

Noel: What stimulated, what inspired the organization of the congregation because for years, Santa Fe did not have a congregation.

Lance: So, I'm not the guy to really answer that, so I'm going to hold back. I would only assume they got tired of meeting in people's house, and having a center was a logical next step. And you know, it was a big deal because they didn't have the Rabbi Scheiling (?) who came from Albuquerque. And they had a part-time rabbi, with obviously lay leaders and some of the families, like the Silvers and the Cohns/Kahns (?) and the Petcheskys and the Spitzes and there's many others I'm not thinking of.

Noel: Was there a great influx of Jews into Santa Fe after the World War that --

Lance: Yeah, I would think so. I mean, the Jewish community grew as time went -- as time had been, you know, the Los Alamos connection. There's no doubt that there were people moving into that area to work in the labs, and/or just to establish businesses there. But I would assume that had something to do with that.

Noel: When you were growing up, what were the other remaining significant Jewish businesses?

Lance: So, I remember that because I was downtown pretty much every day. And I lived, you know, I'm so lucky that I was able to be like downtown and I saw the characters in that town. Every town has them and I --

Noel: Livingston's Furniture Store?

Lance: Oh yeah, Livingston Furniture which was run by Al Kaufman, and he was such a nice guy. He was one of my dad's friends. Al and Silvia Kaufman. And I know there's many others. I can't think of them right now. Stop it for one second here.

Noel: While Lance is remembering other names.

Lance: And then there was Harold Gans. It probably was his parents' store which was at 80 East San Francisco. It was on the south side of the plaza, and it was a big store and it was Indian crafts, and they had a big [inaudible]. A few others, I'm just not thinking of.

Noel: Oh, the Picks?

Lance: Oh yeah, the Picks. So the Picks house was in Santa Fe, but they were also -- had a business out in Lamy. They had the Pick's Mercantile store in Lamy.

Noel: And the mining camp didn't they have a store in the area that was -- they did mining or forestry?

Lance: That I'm not sure. Maybe in Torrero. Yeah, I think so. There's that reference this video that Walter Kahn did, when he did a walking tour of Santa Fe that would be great to get all the remainder of the shops.

Noel: Yes. Okay. Now tell us about your upbringing. Your education.

Lance: I had teachers that came in. One, I remember this Hebrew teacher, and Noel, you may know her. Leah Seychelles.

Noel: Yes.

Lance: She came to Santa Fe to help teach Hebrew and she was Israeli. She was strict. She taught me good Hebrew. I have to admit that she really helped me and my brother and I still have all my workbooks.

Noel: We're going to talk to him.

Lance: Yeah.

Noel: But Jon, not Jonathan.

Lance: No, Jon. Ethan, he spells it J-o-n. We were both bar mitzvahed and Rabbi Helman came to Santa Fe in 1974, it may have been '76. I think because they were involved in the Jewish community, but we would go to services with my father. I don't remember my mom going that much. I mean, we would go and they were -- they seemed really long to me. I remember they were -- but I'm so glad we went. I have to say. I can hear the melodies and being in that upper sanctuary at Temple Beth Shalom. [Inaudible]'s best friend's mother made all the drapes that covered the Torah and cover the bema. Her name was -- her last name was Goodman, and I can't think of her first name right now. But it was Irwin Goodman's mother. But, so --

Noel: Did your parents belong to -- what secular? Were they Masons, were they involved in the Elks? And then, especially the Jewish organizations?

Lance: So, I smiled because my father was an Elk, and we would go to the Elks Club in Santa Fe all the time. And eat out a lot then, but I loved going to that place. My father was not a Mason. I don't believe my grandfather was a Mason. My grandmother was a Hadassah member for sure. She was a member of North Star or something star --

Noel: Eastern Star, which is the equivalent, the women's equivalent of the B'nai B'rith, Men's.

Lance: Oh.

Noel: Men's and Eastern Star.

Lance: That was a Jewish organization?

Noel: Oh, no, wait a second, I'm confused.

Lance: Friends with Bruce King and Pete Domenici. I don't know how close they were, but they obviously, you know, he was a supporter of those politicians.

Noel: Was he a Democrat basically?

Lance: Yeah, absolutely. I'm sure he was. I would think so, 100 percent. So, those organizations you said what other? So, Hadassah was a big one, and B'nai B'rith was a big one. And then my father in a -- one thing we need to really focus on one day, not now, is my father started -- he was president of AEII. There should be something written about that, because I have some documents on that too.

Noel: That would be very interesting.

Lance: Yeah.

Noel: Yeah, and in other words, what kind of reception was there at UNM to having a Jewish fraternity?

Lance: Yeah, it was small. I don't know if -- I don't think they had a building, per se. We could save that for another talk. So, he was involved with AE but those were the other organizations that he was involved with.

Noel: Okay, you said they were Zionists. Was he a member of the Zionist Organization of the Americas? The ZOA?

Lance: I don't remember that, but he was the campaign chairman for United Jewish Appeal for 25 years. On his coffee table while growing up, there was *Time Magazine*, *Life Magazine* and the *Near East Report*. It was very common.

Noel: A member of AIPAC?

Lance: Well, back then it wasn't AIPAC, I don't think. It was United -- UJA. I don't know.

Noel: Well, UJA was different.

Lance: Okay.

Noel: AIPAC, like B'nai B'rith, was pro-Israel, but it could not lobby legally for Israel.

Lance: So, he must have been. He was a very proud Zionist, and they instilled that into us, and to this day.

Noel: Well, were there any particular activities that he engaged in as far as being a Zionist? You know, strong supporter of Israel. When did it go --

Lance: So happy, but I think their involvement was post the creation of Israel. A my grandmother -- I have letters that were sent from Israel to my grandparents, and my grandmother. There must have been some family members that moved over there that came from Israel, talking about the wars that were going on in Israel, and what they were dealing with. But he --

Noel: The correspondence may --

We are now on side B of the tape.

So, we've been talking about involvement in Zionism. Did they ever go to any Zionist conventions or meetings?

Lance: Not that I know of. But there were things that were happening that I probably just didn't know about in Santa Fe or Albuquerque. One particular time I remember Moshe Dayan came to Albuquerque at Dalman Cantor's(?) house and my dad went. I'm still trying to get ahold of that photo because there are photos of that event.

Noel: Mm-hm.

Lance: My dad was so happy to be able to meet him. He eventually went to Israel twice in his life. And I'm sure that was the most important trips that he ever took. I know that for a fact. We did not go with him. I wish we would've, but he went by himself.

Noel: Have you ever been to Israel?

Lance: I have once. It was amazing. I'd like to go again.

Noel: We're going to go this December. I've been there twice before.

Lance: Nice. So my father also collected Israeli postage stamps from Day 1, 1948 til the day he passed away in 1981. We have those collections. One day I'm going to show them to you. They are amazing stamps.

I have a lot of historical items that my dad had, about being a Zionist, but he was. He would have done any --

Money-wise, any of the charities that he gave to were pretty much for Israel and Jewish causes. I'm sure some local things too, but mostly it was those.

Noel: Did you ever find out what your father knew about the Holocaust?

Lance: We went to visit my cousin Dina Raam(?) in California and I remember him saying – and I was probably 10, 11 or 12 years old. He said, “She survived the Holocaust.” I didn't quite understand what that meant. But he had told us that his family that stayed in Europe died in the Holocaust. He didn't really ever talk about that, besides just real basically. I wish he would have more. There were a lot of things unsaid. Unasked and unanswered.

Noel: In the time remaining, let's talk a little bit more about yourself. You were born and raised in Santa Fe. Educated in Santa Fe. You went to UNM. Why did you not go into the business? You started to tell me.

Lance: My father died in 1981 at the age of 56 years old.

Noel: He had a bad heart or something?

Lance: He had just turned 56 and he got a muscle disease that was like Parkinsonian; treated like Parkinson's but later I found out it was something called Shy Drager Syndrome. It was a muscle disease and unfortunately he succumbed to that disease. It left my mom, who was not a business lady, and her two sons, myself and my brother running the store. My father knew that something was probably going to happen and he hired a manager, a good manager, to help.

During that time period we lost our lease in Santa Fe. We knew that we were probably going to be kicked out of the spot and we were trying to determine if we were going to leave and reopen somewhere else. My brother Jon was going to UNM and I was still in high school. Our dream was, both of us wanted to work at the store. We loved it. We were working so when we came to -- my brother Jon was working for businesses in Albuquerque. I can't think of the names of the department stores -- so we could kind of learn different ideas. We were going to bring them back. That was our goal. But then, things changed. History changed. We lost our lease, we liquidated the store. It was a good – all the old employees stayed to the last day. We thought about reopening but the best decision we ever did was to not reopen that business. It would have been a big mistake, in my opinion. So, we --.

Noel: Why?

Lance: Just because times change. The malls came. Buying clothes. I mean, it wasn't even the Internet then. It was just competing with the malls and the big department stores. Santa Fe was always like, we were the only home-owned department store. And then the malls came and they opened a Dillards and they opened a big Sears and Pennys. You know, it was just different. The small time with one shop, you can't compete in price with the big merchants.

So we went to business school. And then I actually was going to stay in the retail business, the clothing business. I realized that this is horrible. You're working on your feet all day long. You're working on weekends. You're working on holidays. It's thankless. You don't get paid a lot of money. I decided when I graduated from University of New Mexico, I went to an employment fair. I don't know what they call them. There's a word for them.

Noel: Job fair.

Lance: Job fair. I stopped by – I was like, I'm only going to talk to companies I've heard of. So I went by one called Nestle Food Company. At that time I was hired by a clothing store in Santa Fe. I thought, well if I can work in sales for a marketing for one of these big companies, I would do it. Anyway, Nestle called me up three or four months later and they wanted to hire me. And they moved me to El Paso.

I'm going to say this really quick: I went from Nestle -- they purchased another company, I got displaced. It was a blessing. I got hired by Hershey Food Company. Hershey Chocolate USA and they moved me to Arizona. I was with them for about six or seven years. They moved me back to New Mexico in management.

Then I went from food to pharmaceutical. I went to Johnson & Johnson and I've been with various companies in the pharmaceutical industry. Genentech is one that I was really proud of that I did. Now I'm working a company called Arya.

But I look back thinking I'm glad I'm not in the clothing business. It's just a good thing because I remember when we sold Levis. We were Santa Fe's Levi leader. Bag and Save, which was owned by a Jewish merchant in Albuquerque, wanted to sell Levis in the grocery stores in Santa Fe. I

remember my dad saying, “It’s going to kill us. It’s going to put us out of business.”

So you asked me about the store. We wanted to do it but it just turned out that I didn’t. I’ve been working for big companies. It’s nice. You don’t have to worry about payroll. You can get health insurance, etcetera.

One thing you wanted me to talk about. I married my wife.

Noel: Her full name?

Lance: Julia Caroline Linder was her maiden name. We married in 1999. My mother introduced me to her, kind of. She said, “Call this girl. I know her parents. They’re really nice. They live in Santa Fe. They’re Jewish.” And I called her. One thing led to another and we ended up marrying in 1999. She was living in Seattle. I was living in Arizona at the time. We both, oddly enough, moved back to New Mexico. She didn’t grow up in Santa Fe like I did. She grew up in Palm Springs, California area.

We have one child. Her name is Jacquelyn Ileana Bell. Ileana was named after my father, Irving. She was born in 2001, December 13th. She is now 16 years old, going to the same high school I did. And the same high school my father did, Santa Fe High School.

Noel: Okay. We’re continuing. I asked Lance about growing up in Santa Fe.

Lance: Noel especially wanted me to say about growing up Jewish in Santa Fe, right? Or just...?

Noel: Both.

Lance: It was great growing up in Santa Fe. I didn’t really appreciate all the history that was around me until later in my life but it was nice. We lived about a mile from the plaza. We rode our bikes to town. We skateboarded to town. The elementary school was two blocks from my house. It was a great school. My father went there as well. It was called Wood-Gormley Elementary School.

The same neighborhood that my dad grew up in, we grew up in. It was my grandparents’ house: 727 Gildersleeve. In that school there was, -- I don’t know, there might have been a couple of other Jewish kids but I don’t think so. None of those kids knew anyone Jewish. So I remember when I was learning Hebrew, I would come and they would give me a chance to read

Hebrew in front of them. I did that. You know, everyone was pretty nice. I don't think they quite understood it, so to speak. But it was nice being able to share that with some other students.

I never really experienced anti-Semitism in Santa Fe. I do remember when we went to Temple Beth Shalom one Sunday School, we drove up and the Temple had been defaced with swastikas. They figured out who it was and that's a whole other story.

Noel: Did your parents experience any?

Lance: Not really, besides just ignorance. I mean, people using terms that they didn't really understand like "Jew 'em down" and stuff like that. But nothing really that I can recall.

Noel: Okay, we'll stop here.

[end of recording]