



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



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Title: *Interview with Sigmund Bernheimer*

Date of Interview: *October 2, 2004*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Mary Baumann*

Transcriber: *Gaby Krohmal and Amanda Iacobelli*

Abstract: Born in Alexandria in 1914, Sigmund Bernheimer, "Sig," relays his family history and childhood memories. Memories include those of the family businesses on King Street, such as the Torpedo Inn. Sig remembers selling newspapers at the torpedo plant (now the Torpedo Factory) as a young boy and taking newspaper routes for the local papers. He also describes the trolleys and taxis that operated in Alexandria. This is the first of two interviews with Sig Bernheimer. The second occurred on November 11, 2004.

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Sig Bernheimer, 2004

INTRODUCTIONS

Mary Baumann:	Today is Saturday October 2, 2004. My name is Mary Baumann, and today I am interviewing Sig Bernheimer at his home on South Lee Street. Sig, can you please give us your name? Just your name.
Sig Bernheimer:	My name is Sigmund Stern Bernheimer.
MB:	What is your address?
Sig Bernheimer:	117 South Lee Street Alexandria, Virginia 22314.
MB:	And your date of birth?
Sig Bernheimer:	July 10, 1914.
MB:	Can you also give us the names of your parents?
Sig Bernheimer:	My father was Jona Bernheimer. My mother was Martha Bernheimer.
MB:	And what was your mother's maiden name?
Sig Bernheimer:	Her maiden name was Martha Stern.
MB:	Martha Stern. Okay. And did you have any brothers or sisters?
Sig Bernheimer:	I had two brothers. Samuel the older, was a...he passed away in 1999. He was in real estate with Bob Duncan. And he quitted a branding operation, Bob was the politician. Norman became a lawyer, and he passed away in 2000.
MB:	So, two brothers?

Sig Bernheimer:	Two brothers.
MB:	And how about your wife? You were married for...
Sig Bernheimer:	We were married 1938. We were married 57 years. She died December 20, 1995.
MB:	And what was her name?
Sig Bernheimer:	Doris Bernheimer.
MB:	Do you have any children?
Sig Bernheimer:	I have two children. Carol Hammond and Jon Bernheimer.
MB:	And then do you remember...where any of your children were born...were they also born in Alexandria, or—
Sig Bernheimer:	Carol was born in Alexandria. Actually, she was born in Walter Reed Hospital. We were living at 800 South Washington Street. And she was born in [19]43. She was 60 this year, so that was this year...so she was born in [19]44...
MB:	She was 60 this year, so [incomprehensible] it was [19]44. Okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	And Jon was born in [19]47. Jon is J-O-N. My father was Jona, and he took a beating all the time for that name.
MB:	So you dropped the “h.” [laughing]
Sig Bernheimer:	Dropped the “h” and its Jon. Jon, he works for Montgomery County, in Maryland.
MB:	And what year was he born?
Sig Bernheimer:	He was born in [19]47.
MB:	Okay. So we’ve gotten that basic information out of the way.
FAMILY HISTORY	
MB:	And you were born here in Alexandria, Virginia?
Sig Bernheimer:	Right.
MB:	So you’ve lived here off and on your whole life?
Sig Bernheimer:	Right.
MB:	Now let’s start with your family and when they came to this area. And we’ll, we’ll move from there.
Sig Bernheimer:	My grandfather, Samuel Bernheimer, came from Germany in 1837, and settled here in Alexandria. We had relatives...here in Alexandria we had relatives and in Philadelphia. We had two of them...two relatives

	introduced my father and mother, and they were married in 1910. Samuel was born in 1912, I was born in 1914, and the lawyer, Norman, was born in 1916.
MB:	And what do you know about the family, in the area, before you were born?
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, let's see, Grandfather came over from Germany and settled here. He opened a store down on King and Lee Street, 1840s. He died in 1988. Had gotten...
MB:	1888?
Sig Bernheimer:	1888...
MB:	Okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	Customer buying a gun, at the store, he had pulled the trigger and it must have been...there was a bullet in there...
MB:	...Oh.
Sig Bernheimer:	...so he took about seven months, they solved with penicillin and he survived.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	But he died in 1888.
MB:	So what type of shop was it?
Sig Bernheimer:	Ah, there was...Oh, on the first floor men's clothing and that, that was the harness-making machine that they added to the back of the store...and even in my time. I think they closed that down about 1926. It made saddles, bridles, and reins, there in the store. The second, third, and fourth floor there was furniture. And uh...[incomprehensible] Father died in 1828 [1928], mother ran the business until [19]31. At that point she closed it and opened a new...dress shop at King [Street] and Patrick Street in 1932 or [19]33.
MB:	So up until 1931 your family had a shop at, what is now, the Why Not? Shop, on King Street?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah...at King [Street] and Lee [Street].
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES: BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES	
MB:	King [Street] and Lee [Street]. Okay...interesting. And now, so did you spend a lot of time in that shop down there, as you were growing up?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. I like to say my young years. I still am...[unintelligible] there was a cash drawer a nickel or a dime [laughs].
MB:	And what did you do with the money?
Sig Bernheimer:	I'd go to the candy store. [laughs] Oh by the way, on the uh...history along that side. George Washington...there was a drugstore at King [Street] and

	Fairfax Street. And George Washington ordered castor oil for Mount Vernon, a gallon, imagine, for the animals. But that was...in my time Leadbeater at the drugstore. There was a drugstore at almost every corner on King Street. Crayton was at King [Street] and Royal [Street]. Forefield was King [Street] and Pitt [Street], Timberland's [was at] King [Street] and Washington Street. There was Copper's drugstore at Columbus Street. Gibson's at Alfred Street. And, there was two [unintelligible] more had been drugstores in...[unintelligible] theater.
MB:	That's quite a few drugstores.
Sig Bernheimer:	There were about 20 drugstores almost in a row.
MB:	Oh, interesting. What were the other businesses on the street at this time?
Sig Bernheimer:	There were, let's see, Ready to Wear, [unintelligible] Ezrin, and just off of...King [Street] and Washington [Street].
MB:	What was the name?
Sig Bernheimer:	Ezrin.
MB:	Ezrin—
Sig Bernheimer:	And then he went in to real estate later...now let's see...Woolworth had the store where Murphy's is now, at King [Street] and Washington Street. People named Smith owned the building. There were three stores on King Street: a Greek Restaurant at King [Street] and Washington [Street], pointing toward the river, Sanitary Grocery Company, and then another Greek restaurant. And the Smith family owned the building. Upstairs were the twenty one-room offices. And, they sold...there was a Smith daughter, who, at that time, used to walk around Alexandria with a paper carrying bag, with twenty thousand dollars, twenty-five thousand, thirty thousand dollars. She didn't really like banks. And nobody ever [incomprehensible] and took the money.
MB:	Oh my goodness.
Sig Bernheimer:	But there was half a dozen men's clothing stores up and down King Street.
MB:	When you were a boy?
Sig Bernheimer:	Growing up.
MB:	When you were growing up.
Sig Bernheimer:	So in the...the Alexandria Gazette was in the 300 block King Street. And the um...you know where the fountain is now? And City Hall, where the clock...they had shops in there. I shouldn't tell you this one, I won't really mean it.
MB:	Okay.

Sig Bernheimer:	There were five or six...Shuman's bakery was in there, Johnson's meat market was in there, with three or four of us...no doors, no walls, the one shopping to the other.
MB:	Like a market.
Sig Bernheimer:	...the store employee. Oh, and they closed up at night. There was a key in the side door and they turned the key and had it at the police station. One time Shauncy had a roast ready for next-day delivery. When he looked for it, he couldn't find it. They...would that we played a...something...truck one-night delivery the next day, it was taken. After that, we decided to leave someone on the premises when the market closed. So, a couple nights later, someone came in after everything was closed up; put the key in the hole and opened the door and went through with a flashlight, picking up the bakery and this that and the other. They turned the lights on, at a very, very high city employee. He had a [unintelligible] girlfriend in town...when he went to the grocery store and he was buying groceries for his girlfriend, the two may have caught up with him. And so rather than taking a chance on being caught, he got caught [laughs]...
MB:	Yeah, he sure did. Can you tell me what year that happened?
Sig Bernheimer:	It was in 1926 or 1927. Somewhere in there.
MB:	And what was the location again, of the...
Sig Bernheimer:	City Hall.
MB:	...the market...
Sig Bernheimer:	The markets were first of all at City Hall. Now on the outside where they have the sweet country markets, Saturdays now...the farmers used to bring stuff in there, in the open markets, outside.
MB:	Well that's great, though...
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible]...In 1750, George Washington, Lafayette, and General Braddock [unintelligible] British troops over here... Alexandria was a British possession and those three were [unintelligible] British troops that marched from Alexandria to Fort McCord up in Pittsburgh. But those three units of troops—and they left Alexandria with a cannon—road up Braddock Road to 350 miles to Pittsburgh to fight in the French and Indian War, the British during this war fought the French and Indians.
MB:	Uh huh, interesting...
Sig Bernheimer:	But George Washington, Lafayette, and General Braddock moved the British troops. [unintelligible sentence].
MB:	So you remembered a bunch of businesses on the street, as a boy...do you remember a lot of industry in the area or—

Sig Bernheimer:	No. There was...Potomac Yards on Monroe Avenue. You cross the bridge to get to Monroe Avenue. Ah...[unintelligible]...the industries in that...the industries that we had built... Arthur Brian had a place on 100 block of King Street manufacturing fertilizer, that type of thing. He brought oyster shells up from the Eastern Shore Chesapeake Bay area and the plant was on the side of Lee Street [unintelligible] in the 500 block, and in the summertime the fumes from that place were terrible.
MB:	Really?
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>And I'll give you another one. ...across the street, the ice house was there [unintelligible] on Monroe Avenue, which is across the Duncan Bridge. They manufactured ice just on the Alexandria side of the bridge, and there were some...oh, half a dozen places around the city where they sold ice—refrigerators weren't in yet. Now across the street from the [unintelligible] ice company, they had a place down on Cameron Street on the river. They closed that up. They built this building across the street and there used to be about twenty ice wagons with about forty new [unintelligible] storage behind the building just off of [?] Street there.</p> <p>In the summertime, when I was a kid, kid growing up, 8, 9, 10 years old, every summer the [unintelligible] would get loose and go charging up and down Lee Street, and the kids would try to stop him and got knocked down [both laugh]. But...oh there was a [unintelligible] square with an arrow on it, twenty-five, thirty-five, forty-five, fifty, the ice wagon they hooked up two [unintelligible] in the ice wagon and go around the city. And the people had to sort of look down at this thing up from a window, at thirty five it cut ice [unintelligible] three hundred pounds blocks of ice and then cut a thirty five pound piece [unintelligible].</p>
MB:	Oh, okay, so they had a system to know what...
Sig Bernheimer:	They could actually find out what they wanted.
MB:	...what you wanted, that's very interesting.
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] ice almost every day. People had the ice [unintelligible] refrigerator. Refrigerators came in about...oh about 1925, [192]6 or [192]7, before then people had to pick up ice from the...
MB:	So do you remember that being a big help to have the refrigerator available to you?
Sig Bernheimer:	With the refrigerator you didn't need ice anymore.
MB:	Was it a big change then?
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh yeah, yeah. Because we had to get a 6-pound bucket of ice, about every other day.
MB:	Every other day...

Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] protected [unintelligible].
MB:	What about the torpedo factory over there? When did that...
Sig Bernheimer:	That was put up about 1915 or [19]16. And it manufactured torpedoes until about 1924, 1925. I went to work in the small building that's there now. That was the shipping department.
MB:	And there was another building that was...
Sig Bernheimer:	On Lee Street down to the...was the manufacturing, on Cameron Street [unintelligible]. There was a [unintelligible] steel lumber yard that was there before the torpedo plant went up, I remember that [unintelligible] 19..., I'd say 19[?] [unintelligible]. But Brian [?] had the manufacturing plant for the crowbars[?] from 100 block North [?] [Street]. The other industry Ford, oh this was real late, 1940, [19]45, Ford Motor Company put the [unintelligible] down there, and assembled cars there, [unintelligible] and then the torpedo plant was all the way down [unintelligible] built ships there, after the World War I they brought ships down to be dismantled. There used to be a fire in Alexandria every Saturday night [unintelligible] I think they just, you know, burned them, you know [unintelligible].
THE FAMILY BUSINESS	
MB:	I want to go back to the store that your parents owned. Did you work when you were a kid there, or...?
Sig Bernheimer:	Not work, no... Actually, ...when I was in there I may have helped a couple of customers out, but not full-time. They opened the store in 1840. Grandfather died in 1888. Father was born in 1870. He took over, I guess, by [18]88, after his father was shot. And he died in 1928. Mother ran it for three years, and then she sold it. You know, I've got pictures in this thing. They owned three other buildings on King Street, 200 [unintelligible] 1840, World War I there was a Torpedo Inn, sandwiches, coffee, that type, for the torpedo workers. The third building was [unintelligible] had a pickup for packages for the whole city of Alexandria and, when my father died in [19]28, Mother closed the stores in [19]31 and sold all the three buildings for twelve thousand dollars, four thousand a building, all of them a million and a half going.
MB:	Oh...[laughing] Wow! And, I'm sorry, did you say where the buildings were located? Where was the Torpedo Inn?
Sig Bernheimer:	200 King Street.
MB:	200 King Street.
Sig Bernheimer:	The [Tory place] was 202 and the next one was 204...
MB:	They were all...

Sig Bernheimer:	And 206. Yeah, three buildings [unintelligible].
MB:	Right, ok. What do you remember about the store and what was in the store?
Sig Bernheimer:	The first floor everything was men's, shoes and boots. And then, the second row of columns was men's pants, shirts, and at the back of [unintelligible] harness-making machine, and then [unintelligible] the second, third, and fourth floors were furniture.
MB:	Uh-huh. And your family went into there in 18—?
Sig Bernheimer:	1840.
MB:	[18]40.
Sig Bernheimer:	Grandfather...
MB:	...Do you know anything about that building before they were there?
Sig Bernheimer:	No.
MB:	No.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, you mean before father had it.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	No, I don't remember that at all. You see Grandfather died in the 1880s. Father... Well, Grandfather bought this thing, this is not old. Next door was 1700s probably. George Washington was [unintelligible].
MB:	Yeah.
Sig Bernheimer:	But this one my Grandfather made in 1859. So, Father was born here.
MB:	Uh-huh. ...Pam told me a story about something that you found in the attic...some metal, scrap metal.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh yeah...right.
MB:	Tell me that story.
Sig Bernheimer:	Back then it was a four-story building...
MB:	This is the 'Why Not?' shop?
Sig Bernheimer:	In the Civil War, Alexandria was occupied by Union troops. They took the store away from the family, 1861 to 1865. And, for the family to get it back after the Civil War, and I'm suing for that grant. [unintelligible].
MB:	Oh, you are? [laughing] For four years, right?
Sig Bernheimer:	Before the fourth-floor ceiling and the roof, there's about a four-foot crawling space up there. And there were iron [gibbs?] [unintelligible sentence fragment] stealing the stuff out of the store without anyone

	knowing it [unintelligible]...
MB:	Without your parents knowing?
Sig Bernheimer:	... Yeah, and I'd take it down to this junk shop that was at Prince [Street] and Union Street, iron was probably ten cents to a hundred pounds, whatever, people [unintelligible]. I'm almost sure my grandmother, my, let's see... yeah, grandmother was probably [unintelligible] and [unintelligible] from Philadelphia introduced her to my father, to [unintelligible]. But that was the Civil War [gibbs?] they were stored up between these fourth floor ceiling and the roof, and pigeons, oh, there was open windows on the fourth floor, and pigeons would fly in and what not, in which case we'd get a [unintelligible] and you know, close, but those Civil War [gibbs?]...
.MB:	That must have been hard to get those out of there without anyone noticing. How old were you?
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, I'd say probably 11, 12, 13 or so.
MB:	Did you have any accomplices? Any of your friends helping you out or anything?
Sig Bernheimer:	Nope.
MB:	You did it all by yourself? [laughing]
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah...let's see I went in the store... Oh, they, up there on the, with the iron [gibbs?] I found brooms, there were twelve, they were a bundle, tied together. They looked like a broom that a witch would wear and, a witch would fly with, and I got one out, took it up to the [unintelligible] store between [east of?] King Street and Fairfax [Street] was a [blot?] and barbershop behind there, [Melvin?] had an antique shop. And, this round broom [unintelligible] and they took a [unintelligible] and started separating the straws, it was a straw room, that type of thing. I found that broom up there, I took it up to the antique shop-- by the way the shop was at King and [U?] Street, where the oldest building in town, at King and Fairfax.
MB:	Okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	And, I showed it to the owner. "What's this?" "It's just an old broom", [unintelligible]. "You stole it down at Mount Vernon," that was his story [laughs]. It was just an old broom. [unintelligible] "I'll give you a quarter for it." I did, I took the quarter, and [unintelligible] in Alexandria going in there buying [unintelligible] was selling them for fifty, seventy-five, to a hundred dollars. His story was that one of the workmen down at Mount Vernon, [unintelligible] American Revolution and [unintelligible] Mount Vernon at that time and remodeling, so this son of a gun was using the story that this was down in Mount Vernon...
MB:	That's where the broom had originated from... [unintelligible] So, you had

	just taken one of the brooms, not all of them?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, I took all of them.
MB:	You took them all, and sold them all?
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] they were wrapped up in a veil, so I cut the strings, got them out one at a time.
MB:	So, he obviously knew they were old, and he could pass them off as George Washington's? [laughing] Oh...that's a funny story too.
Sig Bernheimer:	It is.
CHILD'S PLAY	
MB:	...Well, let's talk about being a boy, in the city. And tell me what you and your friends would do for, you know, playing, and tell me a little about school.
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, as a kid we swam across the Potomac River, four of us, and the boat came on with us, one boy climbed in the boat, the other three swam over and back.
MB:	You made it the whole day?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, well we rested.
MB:	How old were you?
Sig Bernheimer:	We were about oh...twelve, ten or twelve, ten, eleven, twelve.
MB:	The person who was in the boat - was that also one of your friends or...
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible]
MB:	...an older person?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, a [unintelligible] woman.
MB:	Oh, okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	It's the only time [unintelligible] doing, so I better go along with you.
MB:	What else do you remember about games that you would play with your friends? Did you play in the streets or did you...
Sig Bernheimer:	We played in the streets. [unintelligible] we had a semi-pro football team, in Virginia. In September they'd start practicing under the light [unintelligible] couple teams from Washington, around the area.
MB:	And how old were you?
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible]
MB:	All of your life...

Sig Bernheimer:	Ya. [unintelligible] were playing there in 1910, 1914, whatever. And then they stopped eventually once they got to 1920, 1925.
MB:	Do you remember the names of some of your boyhood friends?
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, yeah. My friend, across the street [unintelligible] my age. The Phillips, they worked for the gas company and he went to [unintelligible for a few sentences] And oh, here, George Washington [unintelligible], he had the place next door. [unintelligible] Washington owned this, it was just a piece of ground, there was no house on this back in Washington's time, just a lot. And, let me figure this out, oh, next door here there was a one-story [unintelligible] next door a garage. In 1920 and 1921 Washington [D.C.] had a four- or five-foot snowfall, in Washington at 18 th [Street] and Columbia Road there was a [unintelligible], I think it was Knickerbocker, they had a flat roof, with the heavy snow the roof collapsed and killed about 65 [unintelligible].
MB:	Oh, what a shame.
Sig Bernheimer:	It was the first year the...
MB:	The first, when it had just been built. Well, we're getting towards the end of this side of the tape so I'm gonna stop and flip it over, and then we'll continue on your childhood. [Side 2]
CLAIM TO FAME	
Sig Bernheimer:	Friendship Fire Company on Alfred Street—George Washington gave a fire engine to the city. Marshall Beverley, who grew up with me, was vice-president of the bank, was president of the old firehouse. And, presidents, congressmen, and astronauts [were] honorary members. John Warner, the Senator now, was there being taken in as an honorary member. Now he was married to Elizabeth Taylor at that time. When one of them was up on the platform there, for the dance, and I was standing down into the crowd, this voice says "You [unintelligible] get off my foot!" I'd stepped on Elizabeth Taylor's foot, moving my feet around. That's one claim to fame.
MB:	Oh! That's one of your claims to fame. Okay. What's the other one?
Sig Bernheimer:	I was in Chicago for about four months, Evan Fur had half of their labor in the shop selling and cutting furs. And I went to work for them, not in the fur department, not in the cutting and union labor. CIO was pretty sure they were activated and it was Evans Fur threw out [unintelligible] and took on CIO. And the [unintelligible] were walking up and down the state street and [unintelligible] wagons there three four times a day carrying the pickets and the pikes [unintelligible]. The second and third day of the strike I walked down from 800 North to the store, it's on the third floor. Went in the building, got on the escalator, and a guy garrisoned by the column pulls me off and [unintelligible], I hit him and I [unintelligible]. The elevator [unintelligible] grabbed me and pulled me back in, went up to the third

	<p>floor, a fellow named Sam Frank came and got me, “Boy are you in trouble.” “What do you mean, about downstairs?” “Yeah, let’s go see if we can straighten it out.” The two of us went downstairs, walking toward the front door, this two-hundred-pound [unintelligible] comes at me, his fist is up like this. Frank jumped between the two of us and, “Wait, wait, wait a minute, he should not have pulled him off the car, he should not.” We went into a restaurant right there, had coffee and straightened it out. I was not in the union, so he shouldn’t have gotten me and pulled me out, and I should not have hit him. His name was Chicky Hadersman. He was a Capone mobster. He was up for murder three times in Chicago, and I hit him and got away with it.</p>
MB:	Wow, you’re a lucky person! What year was that?
Sig Bernheimer:	That was, let’s see, [unintelligible] it would have been [19]33.
MB:	[19]33, [19]34, in Chicago.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah.
MB:	Well, you’re lucky to be alive I guess huh?
Sig Bernheimer:	We worked this Evans Fur Company monthly pay, we could bring fifteen dollars a week. You know it really was set in by Roosevelt at that time, minimum wage fourteen dollars, son of a guns cut my pay a dollar.
MB:	They did...
Sig Bernheimer:	[laughs]...yup.
EDUCATION	
MB:	Well, let’s go back to Alexandria. We’re still working on your childhood. And can you tell me about your education and school as you were growing up?
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>I was a high school dropout. [unintelligible] credit at graduation and with that, because of summer school, and I didn’t go, the [principal?] was smarter than I am, I picked up a blank diploma, and the next morning when I looked at it down here, it was blank but I fixed [unintelligible] I didn’t go to school [unintelligible]. In Chicago that fur business, September, October, November, for [unintelligible] nowadays he stored almost fifty thousand coats and you know he was always coming in and going out so, [unintelligible] a year and went up to Northwestern University at a Chicago branch down in night school and it was business administration. I was doin’ what they would teach. So with those hours though I dropped out of Northwestern. Four years later I went to New York city at a Chicago firm’s New York office [unintelligible], I wanted to pick up experience to come back [unintelligible]. So, I went to Columbia University night school and with those hours I dropped out of Columbia. High School dropout, college dropout...</p>

MB:	But you got the experience to come back and...
Sig Bernheimer:	...school, school [applied?] not. The newspapers and <i>Reader's Digest</i> was my education.
MB:	Was your education. What about primary education when you were a small boy?
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, I got a picture [unintelligible] building.
MB:	Do you remember the name of the school?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, we went to Washington Street, the 300 block, [unintelligible] yeah, George Washington's building to [unintelligible], to the city of Alexandria. We had three years there of first, second, and third grade. And I remember there was one boy in class in second grade that was at least 20 years old, the teacher when I was in that class made me go outside and sit on the stairs, and he'd go outside and [unintelligible] [laughs].
MB:	This is when you were in first, second, and third grade.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, first and second.
MB:	And so did you walk to school?
Sig Bernheimer:	Ya. Here's the building.
MB:	This is the building?
Sig Bernheimer:	George Washington gave that to the city of Alexandria.
MB:	And is this building still here? Alexandria Academy, is that what it was called, at the time?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yes, yes, but it was actually a public school.
MB:	It was a public school.
Sig Bernheimer:	In those days boys were sent to a different school than girls, and I think we were in fifth grade before boys and girls, you know, were together. But there was boys only at this school, girls only at Lee School on Prince Street there, and as we went to Jefferson School up on West Street then we were together.
MB:	That was after fifth grade...
Sig Bernheimer:	...Ya.
MB:	...you moved to Jefferson.
Sig Bernheimer:	I went there for fifth, sixth, and seventh. And high school was for four years on Cameron Street.
MB:	What was the name of the High School?

Sig Bernheimer:	Alexandria High School.
MB:	Alexandria High School.
Sig Bernheimer:	Jefferson School was on West Street, Lee School was the girls on Prince Street, the other was Washington Street.
MB:	Were you usually going, walking to school with your brothers or—
Sig Bernheimer:	I think no, we were all in different grades, no. We were two years difference between the oldest and uh, 1912, [19]14, and [19]16 were the years.
MB:	What do you remember about your teachers and...?
Sig Bernheimer:	I remember their names.
MB:	You do? Well, let's have that information.
Sig Bernheimer:	Miss Woodward was principal of the Washington Street, and Miss Pratt was in, Miss Wood was second grade, Miss Pratt had the first. The first grade kids....no no, but... oh, I remember, we'd bring the teacher home for lunch sometimes. Walking from school to here, from Lee School down here. Mother did that.
MB:	And you would walk home with your teacher and your mother prepared lunch?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, we had lunch then came back at the school by ourselves.
MB:	So did you do that because you lived close by and the teacher could come and eat with you or—
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, maybe I'd say its eight or ten blocks between the [unintelligible] and fourth grade...but no the teacher would come to lunch and go back to school.
MB:	Oh, that's nice.
Sig Bernheimer:	We had an hour, you know a lunch hour.
LIFE IN THE HOME	
MB:	Tell me about growing up in the house with your brother and your...
Sig Bernheimer:	...this house was falling apart, when my mother died in 1970, the two brothers [unintelligible] was never married and he wouldn't spend a penny in the upkeep. And I brought somebody in here when the second brother died [unintelligible] my money went in. These walls, this house they moved in 1859, there was cracks in all the plaster or whatever, upstairs there was around seven-foot brown rim around the second bathroom upstairs. And, see this was, I'm trying to remember [unintelligible], oh, after I moved down here in [1995?] across the street from the ice house there was a car coming up the street towing a boat, passed a car or two as they made the turn

	coming back up, the boat fell off the platform [unintelligible] and the police and the tow trucks, two hundred people were all there watching. Thankfully enough we looked for a while and came back in. When I came back in the house, the loudest thumper I ever heard in this house in my life [unintelligible] this noise and [unintelligible] about 11 o'clock the ceiling about seven-foot around had fallen on the bed, if I had been in bed, it's about, oh say nine-foot ceiling to the bed, I'd been in there hit my head and my chest weighing about a hundred and fifty pounds, it would probably have killed me. But, when this house went up its walls were cement and mixed cement and horsehair to keep it together. And the guy who did this restructuring in the last two and half years tore the cement out and it's now plaster.
MB:	And you've had a lot done recently too.
Sig Bernheimer:	Right. Especially [unintelligible] I did about in 19...[unintelligible] 2001, he was here a few years, doing the whole house all up.
MB:	And, when you were growing up here, did your mother cook a lot and...
Sig Bernheimer:	No, they had a maid, a cook. You know what, everybody in Alexandria had help.
MB:	Really?
Sig Bernheimer:	I think they got five dollars for the week. Now they could take food home with them or whatever, but they worked five and a half days, Thursday at noon they were off and Sunday they were off. Mother would put one of us in the kitchen Thursday or Sunday or whatever, she did the cooking on Sunday, Thursday the three boys would do the cooking, so we learned to cook from that thing.
MB:	What's your special dish?
Sig Bernheimer:	Mine's veal cut.
MB:	Great.
Sig Bernheimer:	Veal cut is [unintelligible].
MB:	Uh huh [laughs]. And what else do you remember about growing up with your brothers?
Sig Bernheimer:	They put me in bed usually upstairs [unintelligible] and coming from upstairs [unintelligible]. This was the living room, this was summer dining room and the next room was everyday dining room. The kitchen was outside. My mother married after my father died in 1935, my stepdad and she did some remodeling, put the [unintelligible] stair coming down into the everyday dining room. They put me in for a nap one afternoon when I was three four years old, I'd sneak out and with a penny go up to the store for candy or somethin' [unintelligible]. Sally right across the street on Fairfax [unintelligible] had a grocery store. And I'd get out, walk down the steps to

	go out...
MB:	Did you make it back without anyone noticing or...
Sig Bernheimer:	We got caught.
MB:	And you were three or four [laughs], young boy.
Sig Bernheimer:	I was [unintelligible] four years old.
MB:	You were supposed to be napping.
CHILDHOOD WORKING EXPERIENCE	
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. I sold newspapers down at the torpedo plant in 19...this was [unintelligible] World War I, 1918, and I sold newspapers there, and the first day the kids kicked me out of the way, my father came down and got rid of the papers for me [laughs].
MB:	The other newspaper boys.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, the ones who were there, all the boys whatever.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	And [unintelligible] sixteen, cigarettes were ten cents a pack, they would break 'em open and sell them a penny a piece, for people buying one cigarette.
MB:	But, young boys would do this?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, no [inaudible]. I smoked two and a half packs a day for almost twenty years, I started in [19]33 and quit in [19]57. An article in the <i>Reader's Digest</i> , some doctor, tied cancer and cigarettes together. When I read the article I was smoking two and a half packs a day, I quit. When I read the article I quit smoking.
MB:	In 1957.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah.
MB:	Good for you.
Sig Bernheimer:	And I have not smoked after that.
MB:	So what was it like being a newspaper boy down there, do you remember much about the workers at the torpedo factory?
Sig Bernheimer:	No. Oh the workers, no, just coming in going out. But they had machines that manufactured torpedoes and we shipped 'em [phone rings] to [unintelligible] in Seattle.
MB:	Let me press pause here. Okay, continue.
Sig Bernheimer:	That was a temporary thing, seven years [unintelligible] at the torpedo plant.

	When I was about 12 years old I took the news route, I think it was the old <i>Washington Times</i> on Washington Street, and then on each street Prince, Duke, Wythe, [unintelligible], and deliver it around that way. And oh the newspapers were fifteen cents for the week.
MB:	You sold them fifteen cents for the week?
Sig Bernheimer:	Right, there were a couple customers who didn't have the fifteen cents.
MB:	So what did you do?
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] deliver them anyway.
MB:	And when you were just selling them at the torpedo factory; how much did you sell individual papers for?
Sig Bernheimer:	The papers were three cents.
MB:	Three cents, okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	Approximately, somethin' like that.
MB:	And was that also the <i>Washington Times</i> ?
Sig Bernheimer:	That was the <i>Alexandria Gazette</i> .
MB:	Oh, the <i>Alexandria Gazette</i> , 'cause it was a local—
Sig Bernheimer:	Wel,l the [unintelligible] about 1924 [19]25, the <i>Gazette</i> was in the --you know where the fountain is...
MB:	Uh huh.
Sig Bernheimer:	...and the water, the <i>Gazette</i> was toward King Street on that, there was a human fly that came to Alexandria. A man climbed up the outside of the building from the ground to the roof, and [unintelligible] we don't know, he may have a had a wire you know on his back in case, but just by gripping these things he went all the way up.
MB:	He climbed up the building?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yup. And on Prince Street, where the statue is, it was the hotel, the George Mason Hotel, son of a gun climbed there on the next night on the inside corner of the building and again I think he had a wire around the...
MB:	What year was it?
Sig Bernheimer:	It was in 1924 [19]25, somewhere there.
MB:	So was that a big talking point for people, everybody talked about that?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, everybody in the city came and looked.
MB:	Oh, they went and looked at it.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, ya, ya.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES	
MB:	We were talking about your school class...
Sig Bernheimer:	Sure.
MB:	...do you remember how many students were in your class?
Sig Bernheimer:	I think probably about twenty, twenty-five. [unintelligible] this one boy who was about twenty years old...
MB:	Right the one boy...
Sig Bernheimer:	...[unintelligible] and he just went on home [laughs].
MB:	Do you remember some of the names of some of your classmates?
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh sure, Freddy Landon.
MB:	That was the older boy?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. And there was Franky Landon; he was my age. There was a young girl, she died in [unintelligible] I think was the name they used, that she died from, I don't know what the cause was. But people across the street were Kennels, the next was [unintelligible], the next was Phillips.
MB:	And what, what did the streets look like? Were they dirt roads or cobblestone or...
Sig Bernheimer:	US [Route] 1 was a dirt road. I rode to Mount Vernon when I was eight years old on Washington's birthday. President Harding was down there and put a wreath on Washington's tomb. We went down US 1 and it was a dirt road, and that's where there's a theater down there, I'm tryin' to remember what spot...and there's no [unintelligible] that went off of [Route] 1 down to Mount Vernon. So you [unintelligible] US 1 [unintelligible].
MB:	How did you travel?
Sig Bernheimer:	Bicycle.
MB:	You rode your bicycle down.
Sig Bernheimer:	And President Harding put the cornerstone at that Masonic Temple up there.
MB:	That same year or...
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah.
MB:	Okay.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, by the way, do you know where the second flight with an airplane was? The Wright brothers in North Carolina...
MB:	Uh huh.

Sig Bernheimer:	The second flight was from Alexandria where the Masonic Temple is.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	At Shuter's Hill. Everybody in the city took their kids up there to [unintelligible].
MB:	Did you attend the flight or do you remember hearing about it?
Sig Bernheimer:	I went up there for the [unintelligible] you know, the reservoir is right around behind there... [unintelligible] places around the city where the union troops [unintelligible]. 200 King Street there was a military hospital, and the personnel at the hospital stayed across the street at 106 [unintelligible] the, I guess male nurses, soldiers, lived across the street in there for the Civil War.
CHILDHOOD WORKING EXPERIENCE 2	
MB:	Tell us about where you worked in Alexandria, where you've worked in Alexandria and—
Sig Bernheimer:	Let's see, I worked Saturdays when I was a kid in high school. I put in from 7.00 in the morning until 9.30 at night. Customers came in the store, made their orders standing at the counter. The clerk ran back to the store and ordered five pounds of sugar, [unintelligible] the next thing was five pounds of flour, same place [MB laughs]. And you had to write the prices down on a paper bag add everything up in your head, carry the bags out to the car for the customers, some people want a hundred pounds of flour, a hundred pounds of sugar, put it on [unintelligible] carts, put it on your shoulders and carried it out.
MB:	Did you like that job?
THE STREETCAR AND ENTERTAINMENT	
Sig Bernheimer:	[inaudible] they paid us three dollars for about fourteen hours. I guess they used three hours to fill the [unintelligible]. We had relatives up there and I found a girlfriend up there, so I take my three dollars [unintelligible sentence]. Oh, and the streetcars used to run from Alexandria to Washington. I think they asked for seven cents, whatever, and...the streetcars used to run up and down King Street, the, I think it started at King and Prince [Street], it went up to Columbus Street and turned right on Columbus [Street] to Cameron [Street], Cameron [Street] to about 1600 block, came back up to King [Street], up to Rosemont [Ave.], to Commonwealth Avenue and then to Washington [D.C.]. It'd come out on Commonwealth Avenue, King Street, all the way down to Earl Street. And it, it had two tracks up above but not on the Washington Street, it's just the one track.
MB:	Just the one. How long would it take you then to take the streetcar into Washington D.C?

Sig Bernheimer:	Twenty, about twenty-five, thirty minutes.
MB:	And it cost you about seven cents?
Sig Bernheimer:	Seven cents yes.
MB:	And where would you go to pick up the streetcar to get on it?
Sig Bernheimer:	Just down on King Street.
MB:	Did they have a little ...
Sig Bernheimer:	No, no stands or seats...
MB:	...stand or station...
Sig Bernheimer:	...you just waited for the car.
MB:	Ok, you just knew where to go to wait for them.
Sig Bernheimer:	The streetcar went from Royal Street to Columbus Street, Columbus [Street] to Cameron [Street], Cameron [Street] down to the 1600 like you know [unintelligible], comin' up to King [Street] two blocks back on Commonwealth Avenue and then to Washington [D.C.].
MB:	And then into the city. Where would you go when you went into Washington [D.C.]?
Sig Bernheimer:	The...[unintelligible] theater at the 15 th [Street] and New York Avenue, at 14 th [Street] and F [Street] had a theater. And we had [unintelligible] you know those things. I was on the stage once.
MB:	Oh, you were?
Sig Bernheimer:	Ya. I was on the second floor balcony and leaned out too far and fell down on the stage.
MB:	[laughs] And did they applaud for you?
Sig Bernheimer:	No.
MB:	No [laughs]. That's interesting. So did you frequently go into Washington or was that like a special—
Sig Bernheimer:	No, I'd probably go every other week.
MB:	Every other week—
Sig Bernheimer:	Right. We went on because Washington vaudeville, which we didn't have. They had three movie theaters in Alexandria. The Nincomar, the Igle was on the 300 block of King and the 600 block was the Nincomar, and the Green Theater was in the 1700 block.
MB:	And, you worked as a teenager you said at that one site...

Sig Bernheimer:	On Saturdays.
MB:	After that you moved to...
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] was with the...in Chicago the [unintelligible]...
MB:	...Chicago right.
ADULT WORKING EXPERIENCE	
Sig Bernheimer:	And then when I came back from Evans Fur [unintelligible], when I came back to Alexandria, I went into the Hecht's Department Store. That was in [19]57, and I was assistant buyer, on the premise that they'd give me the department when the buyer retired. The buyer retired and they didn't give me the department so I walked out, that's the point I got into the appliance business.
MB:	Uh huh. And what was the name of the appliance—
Sig Bernheimer:	George's, George Chardale, but the Hecht's Department Store was at 7 th and F Street.
MB:	And tell us about the appliance store and how long you were there and—
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, I was in the area, I was with them for 30 years but they moved me around from store to store. The Alexandria had a place at King [Street] and Columbus [Street] and then we moved up to about the 1600 block in [unintelligible], they went from King Street to Cameron Street. And that's where I [unintelligible], I found the first [unintelligible] store in Clarendon and that took me to take a switcher back to the office with the keys, and then they let me run the store, anyway I wanted.
MB:	And then you stayed there, but then you stayed there.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, I put thirty years.
MB:	And when...
Sig Bernheimer:	...[unintelligible] [mom's?] store.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	I found one of [unintelligible] open stores, the riveters, at one point they paid the rent. [unintelligible] play the idea that in the [19]30s or early [19]40s you had to get them a planned figure. So if you planned to give a hundred thousand, that was [elementary?]. If you gave three hundred thousand you had to give him a percentage of the increase, you're working for the landlord, [unintelligible] never signed up for a bill.
MB:	You were happy with where you were, right?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah.
TRANSPORTATION	

MB:	You just talked about the trolleys a little bit. When did they take those out, do you remember?
Sig Bernheimer:	I don't remember...let's see. 'Cause, see, I was away at the time.
MB:	So that was during the time that you were living away.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, but I would say, you know, late [19]40s early [19]50s. They had a taxi war in Washington somewhere around that time. You could go anywhere in Washington for twenty cents, five miles up they had a tax war, a taxi war there.
MB:	This was after they had taken...
Sig Bernheimer:	...No that was in the, probably either [19]50s or [19]60s.
MB:	So was it hard to get a taxi or?
Sig Bernheimer:	The cabs were twenty cents, it was hard 'cause everybody was drivin' cabs.
MB:	Right.
Sig Bernheimer:	Instead of the buses [unintelligible].
MB:	Instead of the buses?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah.
MB:	Do you know why?
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, like I was sayin', as long as you get a cab they didn't need to ride the bus.
MARRIAGE	
MB:	When did you marry your wife?
Sig Bernheimer:	1938 [unintelligible].
MB:	Here in Alexandria?
Sig Bernheimer:	We had 57 years.
MB:	Did you meet her here?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, we worked in the same place in Chicago. Then I left Chicago to take a New York firm and we were apart for about, I'd say two and a half years. We were married here on Oak Street and living in New York, I was in New York. We rented a building, an apartment at 72 nd [Street] and Riverside Drive. Andy Goodman, the [unintelligible], he lived in that building. I think rent was \$49.50 for one-bedroom apartment, [unintelligible], Riverside Drive in New York. And we went there, in New York, in ...oh we were married in [19]38 so let's say about 1940.
MB:	And you came back to New York or came—

Sig Bernheimer:	We came back down here.
MB:	Back here.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. [unintelligible sentence]
MB:	Right.
THE CIVIL WAR VETERAN	
Sig Bernheimer:	I knew a Civil War veteran that served from 1861 to 1865. Eddie Warfield was a seventeen-year-old who met up with 45 Alexandrians and walked from Alexandria to Richmond to join the Confederate army. He was a drummer boy in the four years of the Civil War; he came back to Alexandria about 1865, 1866, whatever, went to pharmaceutical school, and opened a drugstore here in Alexandria at Prince [Street] and Fairfax Street. After about three years, he moved over to King and Fairfax Street, Warfield's drugstore. He ran it from that time until 1897, and his son [unintelligible] Warfield [unintelligible] took over, and then the junior son took over, and uh the old colonel took over until about 1935. But when Eddie Warfield, the drummer boy, came back to Alexandria and opened the drugstore that the old colonel used to come into the.... Oh, I'm sorry, the colonel died about 1932. I have a paper here that [unintelligible] but the old colonel in 1932 was still alive, he'd come in the drug store [unintelligible] may have been 1927, 1928, and he'd have a soda or ice cream with kids and tell us Civil War stories.
MB:	That must have been very interesting for you.
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] I think that's...
MB:	You heard a lot of history growing up in a historical city.
Sig Bernheimer:	Sure did [shuffling through papers].
MB:	So they still honor him years past?
Sig Bernheimer:	Right. The Confederate Sons of America or whatever.
MB:	That's great.
Sig Bernheimer:	[unintelligible] marching man.
MB:	What kind of stories do you remember him telling you?
Sig Bernheimer:	Just the battles and that sort of thing...
MB:	Battles and...
Sig Bernheimer:	But this old book was [unintelligible] <i>Reader's Digest</i> I had it up front and I don't know what happened to it, somebody may have borrowed it but I have not gotten it back yet. But [inaudible] action this thing [inaudible]...
MB:	For a young boy you were probably very interested in them.

Sig Bernheimer:	...battles and that kind of thing.
MB:	Well, the tape has just about run out, but we'll definitely have to meet and talk to me more about raising your children and your life here in Alexandria. [End]