



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



**Project Name:** *Alexandria Legacies*

**Title:** *Interview with Ethel Abramson*

**Date of Interview:** *April 22, 1999*

**Location of Interview:** *Alexandria, VA at Mrs. Abramson's home (Rosemont area)*

**Interviewer:** *Mitch Weinshank, Intern at the Lyceum of Old Town Alexandria*

**Transcriber:** *Jo-Ann LaFon*

**Abstract:** *Born in 1915 in Baltimore, Mrs. Abramson has lived in Alexandria for the past 80 years. She discusses social life during that time including the Depression. Her father was a successful businessman and her husband the longest practicing dentist in Alexandria. Throughout her interview, she compares social and everyday life in Alexandria today to that of the 1930s and 1940s. Her memories are obviously very happy ones and her descriptions are quite vivid and entertaining.*

**October 2007:** **This interview has been edited for Web-posting purposes and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.**

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*Ethel and Sidney Abramson with Claudine Weatherford, 1981*

Mitch Weinshank:	We're going to talk a little bit about your family background. Can you tell me where you came from---when you were born?
Ethel Abramson:	I was born in 1915 in Baltimore.
MW:	And your family was in Baltimore a long time before that?
Ethel Abramson:	Both families—my father and my mother's side... And then we moved to Hopewell, Virginia and my father was in business there and two of his brothers-in-law came there. And they had a big fire in Hopewell. One of my brothers was born there. Burned down practically the whole town. And from Hopewell, my family moved to Newport News; ---shipbuilding. My father did very well there. He had a shoe store and a bakery and he brought his whole family to Newport News and worked there. And we lived there until after World War I. And then they moved back to Baltimore.
MW:	And when you say "we", who was--?
Ethel Abramson:	My family.
MW:	And that included your sisters and brothers?
Ethel Abramson:	I had my mother and father and three brothers. I'm the oldest.
MW:	And the only daughter?
Ethel Abramson:	The only daughter. And my father stayed in Baltimore and he had a grocery store up on Park Heights Avenue up near Pimlico. I remember I started piano lessons there. That's when I first started playing piano; I went to school there and I remember I skipped from the low Second to the high Third. [Laughter] And, again, there was a fire. Some cousins of mine were playing with matches under the porch and the whole thing burned down. And I was a little girl; in the second grade I think. I remember being sent to a neighbor's house and they had a horse and sleigh. Then from there, my father moved to Washington. He was in business in Washington. Let's see, I was 9-10 years old. I used to give shows to a friend across the

	street. Played the piano and did shows for the kids; charged two cents...
MW:	Oh, you actually charged money for this. So you were a businesswoman too then? [laughter]
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yeah. And this friend of mine across the street, Melaine Rackerson [sp?] eventually became an actress. Unfortunately, she died very young ah----anyway, in 1927, my father moved here to Alexandria. And I cried because I never heard of Alexandria. And I've been here ever since. And I had completed the eighth grade in Washington. At that time here, they had no eighth grade. You went to high school from seventh. But I was twelve years old and I had finished the eighth grade and I went to the George Washington High School, which used to be on Cameron Street where the day care center is now and there was a swimming pool next to it. Anyway, my father had a cleaning and pressing and shoe—he was [inaudible]. The Jewish marshall was head of the Paris Laundry—he owned the Washington Redskins. And he married Corinne Griffith.
MW:	That's why it was named Griffith Stadium then.
Ethel Abramson:	No, that was way before her. ... Anyway, I was a freshman in high school and my husband was a senior. I didn't know him at all. You wanted to know how we met... This is very funny. I was walking down from the second floor of the high school and he was standing at the bottom with a boy and he told him, "you see that girl walking down the steps? I'm going to marry her someday." That's the truth. That's the honest truth. Anyway, I didn't know him from Adam. I was very active in high school; I played the piano for everything. Anyway, he used to stop by to see my mother and he never paid any attention to me.
MW:	That makes you wonder why he stopped by to see your mother. He probably-----
Ethel Abramson:	[interrupting] We had a boy working for us named Milton Fairfax--- he comes from the Fairfaxes of old Virginia—going back to the Mayflower I guess. He always used to kid me about Sidney and I said, "I don't know who you are talking about." You know; anyway, all of a sudden, my husband, Sidney, started ah---we lived upstairs from the store and ah--
MW:	Do you recall the address there?
Ethel Abramson:	First, we lived at 706 King Street and then we moved across the street to 711, which is closed up now. It's boarded.
MW:	But the building is still standing there.
Ethel Abramson:	Yes, 711 King Street. I think was built in 1780 something. I think the cousin of George Washington lived there. Beautiful quarters upstairs—just gorgeous...Tremendous. We never locked our doors and --no one ever locked their doors.

MW:	Even the businesses?
Ethel Abramson:	At night I'm talking about. I had a wonderful childhood—happy family, very happy, loving.
MW:	Did you often have relatives come in from out of town? Did you entertain?
Ethel Abramson:	My mother always entertained—constantly—she was a real Pearl Mesta...constantly entertaining. At dinners at night, she could bring in five extra people...
MW:	And still have plenty of food.
Ethel Abramson:	And still have plenty of food. And, ah, the quarters upstairs were beautiful, but the double living room—tremendous—two tremendous living rooms. Many a time when the boys from Washington would come over to date a girl and the buses stopped running, they knew they could come into the Berkoe [sp?]'s. My maiden name was Berkoe...and find a bed.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes, that's the truth. And parties—you can ask Jim Low [name is difficult to decipher], he'll tell you....the Berkoe house was the...
MW:	That name's familiar to me—I don't know why it is...
Ethel Abramson:	I gave you the name—Jim Low.
MW:	You gave me the name? Is that why?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah. He's lived here as long as I have—longer. His father was a photographer.
MW:	That's right. I think you told me that.
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah.
MW:	And this was—what period are we talking about—in the Twenties here now?
Ethel Abramson:	[19]27 yeah. Late Twenties, early Thirties.
MW:	The next obvious question is with the Depression hitting, how did that affect your family? Or did it?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes. It affected everybody. I remember my father needed a \$500 loan and he couldn't get it. And I remember that no one would loan it to him and he finally got it from Burke & Herbert. And it's strange. Because of that my brother who was with one of the first contingents—he was a flier in the Air Force—that went over to the Pacific during World War II. He lived all over the world. Because of what Burke & Herbert did for my father in those days, he had his account there.
MW:	...Now this \$500 loan—this was to keep his business going? Is that what it was?
Ethel Abramson:	Yes, yes. And he had a laundry and a shoe-shine. He had several places in Virginia. He had a place in Clarendon; he had a place in Lyon Park.

MW:	This Lyon Park—is that Lyon Village? In that that area right there – there’s a little shopping center there?
Ethel Abramson:	I don’t know what is there now. Anyway, I used to go and help there and when I was around fifteen years old—oh, I was quite mature for my age—and also very dependable. At fourteen, I was invited to a University of Virginia house party—a fraternity up there. And my mother permitted me to go, which I would never do for a fourteen year old but as I say, I was very mature. My friend there, I wasn’t even interested in him. He started coming up to my house all the time and I knew he was dating and he belonged to a fraternity. By then, he was in college of course—Georgetown University—in med school. And, I said, “You come up here all the time and you’re taking out girls and inviting them to your fraternity parties or taking them and why are you coming to see me all the time and you don’t ask me?” He said, “I’m waiting for you to grow up.”
MW:	Is that what he said?
Ethel Abramson:	That’s what he told me. He was only four years older than I. So, anyway, I remember he broke down and invited me to a fraternity affair. Ha. And, we went together for a long time. In those days, there was no such thing as “going steady” which I wish they had now. I think this going-steady business is for the birds. And very dangerous. I mean, in those days, God, I wouldn’t even let a boy kiss me until I went out with him about four times. And this going steady business with one boy friend is terrible. In those days, if you went to a dance with someone or a fraternity affair, you might dance the first dance with him but there was always a stag line or someone would tap him on the shoulder. You might dance the first dance and the last dance with him; if you were stuck with him all night, he’d probably never ask you out again.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	That’s right. That’s how things were then. I mean I would go to a fraternity affair and come home with three or four dates under my belt. You know, there was no such thing as going steady; you went steady when you had a ring on your finger, which is more healthy than the way things are today. In other words, that’s my opinion. And I think I’m right. I think the way things are now—going with one person and dancing with him all night, I just think it’s very dangerous as you can see from the teenagers having babies and everything.
MW:	...Did you go down to D.C. a lot for this entertainment—dancing? What were some of the big clubs that you remember?
Ethel Abramson:	...There was the Chevy Chase Lake that everyone went to for dancing and a lot of affairs were held at the Willard Hotel. Most of the fraternities had fraternity houses on 16 <sup>th</sup> Street. Very interesting;

	of course, there are kids 16 years old who think they are entitled to a car. Well, in those days, you were lucky if your family had a car. And it was one car. So, if I was on a date, the boy would come over here on a bus to pick me up and I remember the bus fare was fifteen cents one way to Washington and 25 cents a round trip. We also had streetcars that came up to the street and up Cameron Mills Road and crossed over the Bridge and I think it stopped around 12 <sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania Avenue. Many a time, if no car was available, we would go on a streetcar. That's how it was in those days. And times were very bad I remember. My husband was going to Georgetown University and I think his father gave him \$2 a week spending money.
MW:	Well, that was during the Depression that we're talking about.
Ethel Abramson:	And that had to take care of his lunches and dates and everything. And he used to hitch a ride with Dr. Delaney—they're a very prominent family in town--- who went to Georgetown. He used to get rides over there and back. And the town was very congenial; it was very nice in those days. We had benches that we would have outside and sit on —on King Street and on the side streets.
MW:	On King Street?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes, chairs. And we knew everybody—white or black or whatever. And, well, it was quite something. And in late afternoon, we would go out and sit on the benches and, you know, just sit there and wave. But the town was small and the suburbs weren't as widespread as they are now. Everything's built up now but I think it was just a little past the Rosemont area that the houses were. Most of it was farmland.
MW:	Getting back to King St., I'm going to see if you remember some of these locations as far as the addresses are concerned. On 310 King Street do you remember Lambos Lunch Restaurant?
Ethel Abramson:	Whose restaurant?
MW:	Lambos—L-A-M-B-O-S—do you remember that? ...
Ethel Abramson:	That I don't remember. I remember Timberman's Drug Store, which was on the corner of King and Washington Street
MW:	Yes, yes, it's over a couple of doors now.
Ethel Abramson:	I have a brother-in-law who has passed away—a Dr. Alfred Abramson—who was born across the street from Timberman's Drug Store on King and Washington Street He was a wonderful doctor.
MW:	Across the street from there too, there was the George Mason Hotel, is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	No, that was on Prince St.
MW:	...was it on the corner?
Ethel Abramson:	Not on King St.—on Prince and Washington Street... Very interesting—I found a \$500 certificate that my father-in-law bought

	to contribute to the George Mason Hotel.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah. I don't know where it is now, but I did find it.
MW:	Now, how about George Mason [hotel]—did they have a lot of activities going on—did they have a big ballroom there or?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes, that was the only--
MW:	That was the hotel--
Ethel Abramson:	--only hotel in Alexandria. As a matter of fact, I remember my mother having her 25 <sup>th</sup> anniversary party there. My mother was such a wonderful person; if she saw a poor person on the street, she'd give them piles of sheets or whatever was left over. ...She was a saint—a real saint.
MW:	So you grew up in that environment as far as---
Ethel Abramson:	It was a beautiful environment—really wonderful --- And the town was small, very congenial and—there were only two Jewish [temples?] —one was a synagogue and one was ---the Beth-El Temple was on Washington Street—near Cameron. They had a little red brick building and the [?] which is on Valley Drive now. I remember when it was above a store on King Street. I remember that. My husband's father was one of the founders of Guteszachen [sp?] synagogue. He and Mr. Boge [sp?] and Mr. Hoffman [sp?] and I don't know. There's a book I have upstairs all about the ----
MW:	I believe Beth-El was one of the oldest synagogues in this area, wasn't it if not the oldest one? I believe it went back to the 1850's?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, my mother—my family belonged to Beth-El when we moved here. As a matter of fact, when I was in my late teens, I taught Sunday School there for awhile. But when I married my husband, he belonged to Guteszachen [sp.]—we became members there. I remember during the War, he was president of the congregation at the same time that I was president of [?]. And we gave lots of shows for which I played for and helped direct and did the choreography for. I transferred to Central High School in my junior year because I had an appendectomy and Alexandria High School was so limited that they —in September, they taught subjects one and three like Algebra I and Algebra III or English I and English III. And then in February, it changed to English II or IV and Civics II and IV and when I was ready to go back in February, they were on II and IV and I was on III or whatever. And I didn't want to miss anymore school so I went over to Central and became very active over there also playing the piano and joined a sorority. I made a lot of friends there and—I was very active in Alexandria. I did a lot of shows there—in the Lions Club and I was very active musically.
MW:	Moving ahead to the War years—World War II years---I assume Alexandria had a great influx of people as far as for the War effort

	was concerned. How did that impact you personally—did you feel like you were being invaded or was it something that you knew was an effort to win the war?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes, my husband and I both have lovely certificates from the USO commending each one of us. We have separate –I was very, very active in the USO.
MW:	During the War years.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes. And so was my husband. And the USO was right next door to the—where George Washington High School used to be---where that [?] is now. We used to go there and entertain them and I’d play cards with them.
MW:	When you mean “entertain”, were these troops that were getting ready to be transported overseas or what---
Ethel Abramson:	They were stationed either at Belvoir or you know. And I remember having—must have been very extravagant, I was married. I was married December [19]35. Our first car was a DeSota and then in [19]38 we bought a –I wish I had kept it—but 1938 convertible Packard. Black with red leather upholstery. I think I paid \$1200 for it.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	I think it’s worth \$150,000 or \$200,000.
MW:	Probably is.
Ethel Abramson:	I should have kept it. Anyway...all three of my brothers were taken into the service at the same time.
MW:	At the same time.
Ethel Abramson:	Yes. And one of my brothers was stationed – he used to bring the soldiers from Fort Lee who wanted to come up to Alexandria, Washington over the weekend and I remember that he used the car to bring them up.
MW:	Now in what capacity did he serve---was he Stateside here the whole time?
Ethel Abramson:	No; he was a Lieutenant.
MW:	He was Stateside the whole time or was he-----?
Ethel Abramson:	No, he was stationed in the Azores. He was my older brother and my middle brother, the one in the Air Force, was over all through the Pacific campaign. He was a war hero. He was written up. And my baby brother, Harold, was in officers’ training school when he was.....they called him into service and he remained a pilot. And he went all—all through that campaign in Europe.
MW:	Oh, he did?
Ethel Abramson:	And he said the worst –I think one of his buddies was blown up right next to him in a trench. He said the worst day of the whole war was after the peace was made in Europe--

MW:	After?
Ethel Abramson:	And they were going home. I think they were in training somewhere. They were looking at a movie and they stopped the movie to announce that Japan had made peace with the United States. So, they weren't going to Japan—well, they went amok and he said that was the worst day—they were shooting, they were shooting pistols—they were so happy and he hid—what do you call those things they have in the ground in Europe? The latrine? I don't know what do you call it? He hid in there to save his life. I mean he was scared to death. But he said that was the worst thing. And another interesting thing and I have a newspaper article upstairs.... All three of my brothers were in the service and in different areas. And one day, as I say, I'm reiterating, this was written up in the newspaper. All three of my brothers arrived at my mother's house on the same day—within five minutes of each.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	Um hum. My brother from the Pacific and my brother from the Azores and my brother from Europe. All three of them came to...
MW:	That's amazing.
Ethel Abramson:	Isn't that amazing. ... I have an article that was written up in the paper.... 5-10 minutes apart. You know, it was a very happy day.... I remember I used to continuously send care packages over to my brother, Harold, and I remember soup—chicken noodle soup—in the dry packages and all kinds of candy and cookies and things—big packages. My brother said they couldn't wait for my care packages.... And I'm not bragging but my brother told me I was—well, that was then; I'm an old lady now. I was very beautiful as a youngster and he had my picture and he told me that they had put my picture up as their—what do you call it?
MW:	Kind of like a mascot? Not a mascot ....
Ethel Abramson:	Instead of Bette—what was her name?
MW:	Bette Grable?
Ethel Abramson:	Grable—yeah. My brother tells everybody that.
MW:	Is that right? [Laughter.]
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah. But anyway, they finally tore up the railroad tracks. Oh, I remember the Masonic Memorial being built.
MW:	Okay, right—which was what? [19]32?
Ethel Abramson:	I used to look up from the 700 block of King Street.... And see them gradually building the Masonic Temple and they told me that the stones came from all over the world. Did you know that?
MW:	No, no.
Ethel Abramson:	Have you ever been in the Masonic Temple?
MW:	No, I have not.

Ethel Abramson:	You should go there while you are here. First of all, the view is magnificent. They have the largest rug in the world in there.
MW:	The largest what?
Ethel Abramson:	Rug... Yeah, beautiful. And they have a very rare train setup downstairs. I haven't been there in years so I ----you really should go there while you are here.
MW:	... Anyway, getting back to these war years, I'm kind of interested in World War II actually. That's one of my areas of interest. You hear about all these—the scrap drives and things like that and victory gardens and things, did you see all those?
Ethel Abramson:	I not only saw them but my back yard....
MW:	Was a victory garden huh?
Ethel Abramson:	Not only a garden, but I had chickens.... And my husband used to catch the chicken and, you know, chop their neck off or something. I remember my children would not eat the chicken. We had a victory garden—everything. Carrots, string beans, cucumbers. My husband was so funny; I remember the first carrot coming up and he pulled it up out of the ground and he said, “You see this carrot—cost me \$5.” Oh, we had a victory garden. A lot of people had victory gardens. I remember things were so bad that—the Depression was terrible. And times were so bad, I remember the soup kitchens ...
MW:	Right here in Alexandria?
Ethel Abramson:	Yes.
MW:	Where did they have some of the soup kitchens set up?
Ethel Abramson:	I don't really remember.... I remember people selling apples.... I did very well in high school. I mean I was almost a straight-A student. My parents were unable to send me to college. I had to get a job. So I remember I got a job at the main [?] in Washington, which was on 9 <sup>th</sup> and G Street. And that's where George Marshall had his office—the owner of the Redskins. Well, the only reason I got the job was because my father and mother had the agency here in Alexandria. You won't believe this—I worked for \$10 a week... And in those days, they could work you eight hours whether you wanted to. I remember I used to leave here 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning on the bus and they would make me go off at 12 o'clock and I would walk the streets for 2 or 3 hours and then come back. So, I wouldn't come home until 7 or 8 o'clock at night or later. Well, they were able to do that. Well, anyway, from there –I mean it was too ridiculous—I was paid \$10 a week and I had a quarter a day expense money—it sounds ridiculous now—but that's really the way it was. From there, I volunteered my services to the Jewish Social Service Agency. That's where I was one of the fastest typists in Virginia.
MW:	I guess that's because of the piano.

<p>Ethel Abramson:</p>	<p>Because of the piano playing. And also wonderful in shorthand. Anyway, I volunteered my services. And my mother had a cousin who was very active in non-profit work and I worked at that Agency for quite a while. Anyway, I got the most wonderful job. I was secretary to the head of the community drive. What was it called then? It has a different name now. ---that you contribute to every year. What is it now? Community Chest! ... That's what it was called. The president at that time was head of the Studebaker Company. I was his secretary. I was recommended and my God, I made—which was a fortune—I made \$25 or \$30 a week with overtime. When that was over with, I was out of a job and that's when the Civil Works Administration opened, which eventually became WPA -Work Projects Administration under Harry Hopkins. And I remember there was a guy then named Collis G. Harris. You see, I'm an old lady, but I have a good memory. And he wouldn't hire me... So I told --he was not my husband then--my boyfriend told his father who knew the Congressman, I think his name was Smith, and my father-in-law called the Congressman's office and said that his son's friend who was one of the top stenographers and typists has been over to WPA for an interview. The Congressman called the Personnel Office and I went there and he was a little irritated—this Mr. Harris, “All right, you want me to send you for an interview, but I'll tell you right now, you won't get it. This guy has had six secretaries and he fired every one of them.” I said, “Thank you.” Well, I went up there and I was taken right away as a stenographer and in six months, I became secretary. And then after that, I became the Assistant Chief of Printing and Mining and I was there for ten years. I was so excited the day I got the job! I ran and told my mother; they were ---times were so bad - they were going to lose the building they were in. And I called because I gave every cent I made to my mother and father and I really saved their building.</p>
<p>MW:</p>	<p>Was this the same period of time that he asked for that \$500 loan?</p>
<p>Ethel Abramson:</p>	<p>Oh no, this was much later than that... That \$500 loan was around 1929 or something. ...All the boys and girls in Alexandria used to come up my mother's place on King Street; they all courted there. It was like an open house; it was wonderful. The Berkoe house was the mecca...</p>
<p>MW:</p>	<p>As far as your husband's practice was concerned...</p>
<p>Ethel Abramson:</p>	<p>He started his practice in 1933. There were only a few dentists in Alexandria then. [laughter] I remember one old dentist who was very cheap-- charged 50 cents to pull a tooth. I think my husband was expensive; he charged a dollar or two dollars. Anyway, there were very few dentists. He opened in 1933 and he retired in 1996.</p>

	He was not the oldest but we were told, he was the longest practicing dentist in the state of Virginia—53 years he practiced.
MW:	So he must have known every mouth in town then—just about [Laughter].
Ethel Abramson:	He knew. But all of us knew everybody. And we walked to school. We didn't have any bussing then. And you went to your neighborhood school, which I think was wonderful. 'Course, you could be active in the PTA; this way, when you live in one part of town and your child goes away somewhere it's very difficult to go to PTA meetings.
MW:	That brings in the whole issue of integration during that period of time.
Ethel Abramson:	I know....
MW:	... We're going to move on to the period of time around the 1950's. I think a lot of things happened in the City. You had the integration of the schools and I think some of the early urban renewal and I think that was the period of time when they lost quite a few of the historic buildings in the area. There was a lot of just tearing down of buildings indiscriminately from what I've heard from other people. What is your thought –what is your take—on that?
Ethel Abramson:	I don't remember the tearing down of historic buildings because one thing about Alexandria—they're very proud of their history and their old buildings.
MW:	Yes, they are. But I think a lot of them were also lost.
Ethel Abramson:	Is that right?...
MW:	[other side of tape—inaudible beginning] -----in Fifties and some of the changes that were going on in the City at the time.. What are some of your takes on some of the major events? Let's go back a bit. I know that George Washington's birthday is a very big event in Alexandria.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes indeed.
MW:	--and they generally would have the president of the United States speak on a lot of occasions. Did you ever get a chance to see any of the presidents speak?
Ethel Abramson:	I didn't hear them speak, but I used to see President Wilson who used to take a drive in an open car practically every day down Washington Street. In an open car with his wife; I think he was ill at the time. But they used to drive down Washington Street. I think they used to go to Mt. Vernon and come back. I remember that vividly.
MW:	Now you know that President Wilson was the only president that lived in Washington DC after he was president. ...He was a pretty good man; I don't think a lot of people don't realize the impact he had on the world.

Ethel Abramson:	Yes, he was. It's unfortunate that he became so ill...
MW:	Right. But you never had a chance to actually see any of these presidents in person. I know that Roosevelt came to Christ Church quite often and spoke. I'm sure it was a tradition that went on for many years.
Ethel Abramson:	I was very, very busy during the Fifties. I was extremely active in doing charity shows and it kept me busy day and night. And I did a lot of writing for lyrics you know and transposing music for people not only here, but also in Washington.
MW:	Now where were some of these performances in Alexandria—where did you actually perform?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, they were performed at the USO Building, which has a large auditorium and down here at Maury School with the Lions Club and B'nai B'rith and I gave one at Constitution Hall.
MW:	Oh, you did?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes—they were very expensive seats. All charity. And the Shoreham Hotel.
MW:	Mostly classical music or popular stuff...
Ethel Abramson:	No, this....I want to show you something. [Pause]
MW:	Now this was the same time you were raising your children so I guess you were—doubly busy.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes. My daughter was taking piano lessons. I never had to fuss with her about practicing.... I continued taking the piano after I was married.
MW:	I've interviewed about twelve people now and the feeling I get for the City of Alexandria—I've interviewed blacks and whites—and a lot of people, both blacks and whites, have told me a lot of the neighborhoods were mixed neighborhoods and there really was no problem. Everybody got along. What is your...?
Ethel Abramson:	We had no problems.
MW:	You say the same thing then?
Ethel Abramson:	Absolutely. I had no problems.
MW:	I mean it didn't matter if it was a low-class neighborhood or a high-class neighborhood, it was still in a lot of cases, were mixed neighborhoods, but the people got along.
Ethel Abramson:	No, I don't remember that. I don't remember that—on King Street.
MW:	Not on King Street. I'm thinking of a gentleman specifically on Columbus—North Columbus Street -- He told me that there was a mixed neighborhood and...
Ethel Abramson:	It would be in the, I forget, in the six or seven hundred block I think. 'Cause when I was first married, there weren't many apartments available. One of the members of the synagogue was building a duplex or whatever and we rented an apartment from them—a one-

	bedroom. I remember it was \$47.50 a month—Ha.
MW:	And where was that located? Do you remember?
Ethel Abramson:	706 North Washington Street, which is now a motel I think. They tore it down. And we moved across the hall when I had my first baby to a two-bedroom apartment and that was \$57.50 a month. [laughter]
MW:	\$10 more for another room.
Ethel Abramson:	Yes, yes. And then we built this house in 1940; it was completed in October of 1940. Gosh, this house is going to be 59 years old. I can't believe it.
MW:	...So, you're saying that this area was the suburbs and the Rosemont area was....
Ethel Abramson:	This was the early---historically, next to Old Town, this is the second.
MW:	Do you know how it got its name Rosemont?
Ethel Abramson:	No. I know there was a Mr. Ezrynn [sp?] and I was very friendly with his daughter, Hilda, who passed away. But this is called the Ezrynn something area. Because he built that house next door to me. He built quite a few houses here and on Myrtle Street, which is the next block over. It runs the same way as Junior Street... He built those Spanish houses there. We were looking for a home and I went to see that house was for sale up there and my husband looked down and he saw this empty lot here. So he went to City Hall to find out who owned it; it was a man in California. Oh, he asked my neighbor next door who owned the lot and he told him—gave him the name of the man. And my husband wrote and said he would like to buy this lot to build a home. And the owner wrote back and said he really did not want to sell the lot. And my husband wrote back and said his wife was expecting a baby and we loved the lot and the location and would be very appreciative if he would sell it. So he did sell it and we paid \$2500 for it.
MW:	How long did it take them to build this house? Do you remember?
Ethel Abramson:	We had a wonderful builder—a Mr. Bayliss—and, I tell you this house is built like the Rock of Gibraltar—all wood, thick plaster walls. And we paid very little for this house. I can't believe it. We had a wonderful architect.
MW:	Now this was a local architect?
Ethel Abramson:	I really don't know. But I like the way he did the staircase, which is a hanging staircase. There's no bottom to it. You know. Anyway, I raised all my children here and I've had a lot of happy days here and I used to entertain a lot too. ... As I say, during the Fifties, I [pause] don't remember those historic buildings being torn down. That's terrible.... It's amazing to me what has happened to Old Town. It's very festive at night. I think better than Georgetown really. And

	more interesting.
MW:	So, you're saying it's kept a lot of its charm—it didn't lose the charm that it has had over the years.
Ethel Abramson:	I think it has enhanced its charm in Old Town. The only thing I object to and I really do. I don't think there's a niche of land that they are not using now.
MW:	Yes, that's true.
Ethel Abramson:	It grieves me what they've done to upper King Street. It looks like the buildings are inches apart and they continue building. ... The small town feeling I think is more or less reflected in the lower part of King Street or the side streets. And I think they way they have rehabilitated some of the homes on the side streets –North Alfred and Lee Street...I think is wonderful because they were really an eyesore. And also on Prince Street--it's wonderful the way they've repainted them and made them so charming with their gardens. One of our patients, Admiral Barrett, who comes from the very famous Barrett family. In fact, they gave the library -----lived in the narrowest house in Alexandria. I think it's on Queen Street. They lived there for a while....[discussion of Antiques Road Show]
MW:	...As far as the Old Town feeling is still there—
Ethel Abramson:	In the lower part of Alexandria. I think it is still there. But I think when you get up past the ...of course, there's that big building in the 1100 block on the corner of Henry and King Street. Boy, I couldn't believe it when they built that building. It's almost a block wide. I think some of the stores still have their charm but boy, when you get up there toward the railroad station and ah---all those buildings that are going up on Prince St. Egods! 'Course I don't go down there very much anymore, but I think Alexandria has kept its charm –in the Old Town really. And I don't think the [inaudible] out here have affected it too much except that the prices are really high. Egods! It's amazing.
MW:	So you would say maybe the period of time that you lived through the thirties or so that that wasn't too bad...What kept you going, I think, was a close-knit family. You had a lot of happiness you said-
Ethel Abramson:	The happiest home I tell you. My father just adored my mother and she was such a wonderful person—she helped so many people.
MW:	I would imagine he put in long hours if he had his own business all those years.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yeah. He was so funny. He had a sense of humor; he should have been on the stage. My mother and father—they were such wonderful company that they really mixed with my friends. They really did—they mixed with my friends. [pause] No, it was very bad during the Depression, I remember, but we never felt it. We always had, as I said my father used to call my mother [inaudible]

	she was a wonderful cook.
MW:	Now did they come over from Europe or I mean your parents.
Ethel Abramson:	My mother was born in Baltimore. I think my father's mother and father came over from Europe. I think he was a baby when he came over.
MW:	So I guess they came to Ellis Island like a lot of people did.
Ethel Abramson:	I guess so. And my father-in-law, very interesting, he came over from Russia and he told me that or told his family that he used to hide in garbage cans to escape from the Russians.... And he came over to America in the late 1800's I think. Couldn't speak English; didn't have any money and I think he moved to ...I think he was in Baltimore for a while and then he was a vendor...a what do you call them?...when you go through the country selling things to people?
MW:	Traveling salesman?
Ethel Abramson:	Traveling salesman. Only I think he traveled by foot.
MW:	Are you serious?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, I'm serious. To Virginia; to North Carolina. Couldn't speak English. And then he moved to Manassas and then he moved to Alexandria. Couldn't speak English and he sent all his children to college.... One became a doctor; one became a dentist. So I can't understand why people can't make it today.... Everything is relative. 'Cause when I made \$10 a week and then went up to \$25 or \$30 a week which was a fortune, I know. Things were so bad that I had PhD's under me. Honestly, PhD's. Things were terrible. Unbelievable. Anyway, of course, WPA went closed up. I had a very interesting job because...oh, incidentally, Lyndon B. Johnson was [inaudible] head National Youth Administration was part of WPA.
MW:	I did not know that connection was there.
Ethel Abramson:	Yes, it was and Lyndon B. Johnson was head of the National Youth Administration of Texas. And I [inaudible] in his biography.
MW:	Is that right?
Ethel Abramson:	Anything in print had to go through my office. And the WPA [inaudible] and then we had to disburse them to all the States...when they came from the Government Printing Office...there were no computers then. We did that all by hand. You know, ...But anyway, [inaudible] were very good in spite of the Depression. I think people tried to help each other. Life was simpler.
MW:	Well, what do you see for the future of Alexandria, I mean we are literally months away from a new millennium here...
Ethel Abramson:	I think the history will always be there and I think there's a lot of technology here in Alexandria especially in that building that's near the railroad station—that tremendous building. It has a lot of

	computer...
MW:	Software companies?
Ethel Abramson:	Software companies yeah. What's that football guy that has the restaurant?
MW:	Joe Theismann?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah. I think Alexandria must be doing well economically because they keep building. They keep building but I hope they...I know they will because they are very, very strict...in Old Town. You know and .... I think most children have a [inaudible] these days. I can't say that about the kids in this neighborhood though. They're all good, wonderful and true. They cut lawns. And I'm looking for somebody to cut mine incidentally. [laughter from both] And neighbors are very nice—intelligent. But they don't go through what we went through... And I don't think there was ever a family as dear, as loving and as close and as happy as my particular family and every...[over riding his voice] will tell you the same thing...[continuing to talk] we were an integral part, many people tell us in Alexandria and I think that made me the person I am and my brothers, you know, more wonderful husbands. Really! I'm very serious about this. And that's because of the way my father was. And my mother. All my brothers. ...And I was so close to my brothers, I taught them everything [laughter from MW]—taught them how to dance, manners. They were all terrific dancers. And so was I. And they're all very happy. Unfortunately, my middle brother passed away a couple of years ago. He was Chief of Staff of Edwin [sp] Air Force Base; that was his last official post
MW:	My last question to you is: Is there anything or any thoughts that we haven't covered that you would just like to make part of the record here?
Ethel Abramson:	I meant to tell you that when I got up to \$25.00 a week which was a fortune in those days. I could buy a whole week's groceries for \$5.
MW:	What were some of the names of the grocery stores?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, A & P; I think that was on the corner of King & Washington Street where—what's there now?---across the street from where Timberline's used to be.
MW:	Across the street meaning diagonally?
Ethel Abramson:	On the southern side---south. Yeah, there was a grocery store there, I remember, and ...I mean for \$5 or \$6 I had a whole week's groceries. And we ate very well. I mean, steak was 25 cents a pound. Oh I remember, we used to go to Washington. And the theatres were 25 cents during the day and 50 cents at night.
MW:	They were air conditioned—a lot of these places? That was one of the big things that got people into the movie theatres, wasn't it?—especially on a summer night?

Ethel Abramson:	That's right. Well, I have to tell you something funny when I lived in Washington. I think I was 10 years old—11 years old. My brothers can't believe this, but it is true! There was a theatre and I think the pianist was sick one day—this was before the movies—and they had a pianist play during the silent movie? Anyway, the owner of the theatre knew that I played the piano very well. He was frantic. He said, "My pianist is sick. Would you play for my movie?" And I did.
MW:	And how old were you?
Ethel Abramson:	About 10 or 11 years old. I remember there was some kind of horses riding or something and I played something like [The William Tell Overture]. [Laughter from both.] My brothers get a big kick out of that. I played for the silent movies and I was so little.
MW:	I know they had that—I think it was 1922 I believe it was---the Rickenbacher snowstorm that they had that killed all those people in that one theatre. It was called the Rickenbacher storm because it collapsed in the roof of that---people were going inside for shelter, you know from the storm and it collapsed—the snow—the weight of the snow. It killed—I think it killed about 60 or 80 people.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh yes, that was terrible.
MW:	Yes, it was a terrible storm—.
Ethel Abramson:	I remember some bad snowstorms when I lived here. I couldn't open my front door. I couldn't open my back door. I remember my son came home from college one weekend and nothing was running. I mean, you could not get a cab up this hill for anything. The snow was very high and he had to go back to Charlottesville. He had to walk, I remember, from here to the railroad station to get a train. And the snow was very deep; I remember that. We've had some bad snowstorms here. [pause] We were very happy and we were very gay. I guess in today's world, you might say, very happily naïve. I have to use those worlds---happily naïve.
Ethel Abramson:	I think the way things were with the youngsters then. We gave a lot of parties—invite boys and girls. We didn't go steady. That was ridiculous. You had a ring when you were engaged- you went steady.... Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me. [Laughter from both] In certain ways, I wish things would return to the way ...Gosh, it was so wonderful; everyone gave parties. I'd give a party one night; somebody else would give a party. We'd invite girls and boys; we didn't invite couples. We invited different boys and girls, you know, and we'd sing and dance.
MW:	And I guess play the piano huh?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, I did that all the time [Laughter from both] Unfortunately, I don't play anymore. [Some discussion of people they know today, etc...]

MW:	Well, thank you once again. I'm going to turn this off.
Ethel Abramson:	Okay.