Tillie DeLeon Transcript

ROZ BORNSTEIN: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein. And I am in—on Mercer Island, Washington with Tillie DeLeon at Tillie's home, and something's—let's see, hang on here just a moment. Hi, this is Roz Bornstein and I am on Mercer Island, Washington with Tillie DeLeon at Tillie's home. The date is May 24, 2001 and I'm here today to gather Tillie's oral history for the "Weaving Women's Words" project for the Jewish Women's Archive. Tillie, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

TILLIE DELEON: Yes, you do.

RB: Thank you very much. Why don't we start with where and when you were born.

TD: I was born in Seattle, Washington on October 14, 1910.

RB: And who were you named after?

TD: I was named after my paternal grandmother, and her Hebrew name is Mazeltov. And they westernized it to Matilda and I westernized it to Tillie. [chuckles]

RB: That's wonderful. And where were your parents born?

TD: They were both born on the Island of Rhodes.

RB: Could you tell us about their backgrounds and immigration to Seattle?

TD: My father immigrated to Seattle in 1905 or 1906. I'm not sure of the exact year but it was before he could bring my mother here. He had to come and earn a living so that he could bring my mother, to whom he was engaged, in the Island of Rhodes. And so when his friend, who was Nessim Alhadeff, was going to Rhodes in 1907 to marry my father's sister, my father asked him to bring my mother with him and his wife, so that they

could be married here in America—

RB: That's wonderful.

TD: —which they did.

RB: What were your parents' names?

TD: My father was David Jacob Israel and my mother was Rebecca Peha Israel.

RB: That's wonderful. What were the circumstances of their courtship and marriage here in Seattle?

TD: Well, they were engaged in Rhodes, and they were engaged for five years because, since the economy in Rhodes was such that there was no place for my father to find work there. He went to Cairo, Egypt and worked there for three years, and then he received a letter from his soon-to-be brother-in-law telling him that this was the land of opportunity and he should come here. So he packed his bags and left Cairo, Egypt and came to Seattle, Washington.

RB: And what was the Sephardic community like here in Seattle at that time?

TD: Well, it was very small. The original people that came to Seattle were two young men from Istanbul, Turkey. And they came a year before Nessim Alhadeff. And being of the same background, they all got together and they were guided and assisted by a very wonderful man of Ashkenazic background, Rabbi Genss. And he took them under his wing and took all the Sephardics under his wing until they were able to take care of themselves. And that went also for his wife and his daughter. The three of them were really guardian angels.

RB: Is that right? Now, you had mentioned the story to me about how the first Sephardic man that came over did not speak Yiddish, and so there was some question about

whether they were really Jewish. Could you—do you remember that story and—

TD: Yes, I do. The two original Sephardics that came to Seattle were Solomon Calvo and Jack Policar. And, since they didn't speak Yiddish, Rabbi Genss would not believe that they were of the Jewish faith. So they had to lift up their shirt and show the rabbi their tzitzit, and the fringe that is applied on that garment where the Jewish people say a prayer with the fringe. And when he heard them saying the prayer in Hebrew then he believed that they were Jewish. [chuckles] And from then on all the Sephardics had it easy. [laughs]

RB: So your father brought his fiancé—

TD: That's right.

RB: —or novia, I guess—

TD: That's right.

RB: —over and Rabbi Genss—how did he take your mother under his wing? How did he help out?

TD: Well, as soon as she arrived in this country my father brought her over to Rabbi Genss' house, because that was the arrangement that they had made. And she stayed with Rabbi Genss for a few days until the Rabbi married my father and mother, and then my mother moved to the house that my father had rented, so that they could start having a home of their own.

RB: And were there other Sephardic women here at the time, or were there a handful or what—

TD: There was another woman that was married approximately the same time that came from Istanbul, Turkey, and her husband was David Levy. I don't know too much about

them but apparently he was engaged to this lady from Istanbul—from the—while he was there. And then when he came here and earned some money, then he sent for her and brought her to this country. And I think that there was a matter of three or four day's difference in the timing of their marriage. My mother said that she was married on a Thursday evening and the Levys were married on a Sunday—the following Sunday.

RB: And do you know what neighborhood your parents lived in when they were first married?

TD: Yes, they seemed to stay together and congregate together, the Sephardics. They lived on 12th and King Street. That's where I was born.

RB: Is that right?

TD: And by the time that I was born there had been a big migration of Sephardics from the Island of Rhodes and from Istanbul and their surrounding areas.

RB: And what year was—so, this was approximately 1910?

TD: Approximately 1908 the people that started coming in is—you know how that goes. I mean, one person tells another and all—they're young. They're adventurous and so that consequently they decide that they too have to go to America and see what it's all about. And their idea was to make enough money so that they could go back and retire in the Old Country. That was their theory. They never planned to stay here forever. [chuckles]

RB: What did your parents tell you about the Sephardic community during those early years?

TD: Well, you know, the Sephardics had their own congregation but they didn't have enough money to set up a building. So I do know that there was two or three factions,one

wanted a certain type of way and another wanted a different type of way. And, well, fortunately, it all turned out that they all got together and they decided to build a synagogue. And the synagogue was started—was assisted by the Reform Jewish community, who sponsored an auction—for—and they collected the merchandise. They were able to collect enough money so that they could start, which would have been the seed money. And then the members starting putting in their own money too to build a synagogue.

RB: Isn't that something? And so this was Temple De Hirsch, the Reform Ashkenazic?

TD: Yes, but Temple De Hirsch was the Reform Temple and they—but they assisted. They assisted the Jewish people in any way they could.

RB: That's wonderful. That's really wonderful.

TD: Right.

RB: And what was the name of the congregation?

TD: The name of the congregation eventually became congregation Ezra Bessaroth.

RB: For the Jews from Rhodes.

TD: For the Jews from Rhodes. Those that had come from Istanbul, Turkey had formed their own congregation and their congregation was the Sephardic Bikur Holim congregation.

RB: Now, I have read and heard about another congregation, and I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it correctly so bear with me, but Ahavath Ahim?

TD: Yes.

RB: And what do you remember about that or know about that?

TD: Well, from what I understood—you know, the Jewish people have a tendency that if there's two people there they have to have three congregations. [laughter] But as far as the Ahavath Ahim is concerned it was sort of a branch, a takeoff probably of both congregation members, you know, who had different ideas and believed in a certain person's leadership.

RB: I see. And so both Jews from Rhodes and from Istanbul and its—

TD: Had belonged to the Ahavath Ahim.

RB: I see. Okay, at the same time.

TD: Well, they divorced themselves from their congregations because they couldn't afford to be members of two congregations.

RB: I see.

TD: So they divorced themselves from their congregation and joined the Ahavath Ahim. And that's the way that I remember hearing as to what happened.

RB: Okay. What roles did men and women have at that time? What role did your mother play? Was she—was it a traditional household? Was she in the home? Was she—

TD: It was—it was definitely in the home. The women did not work.

RB: Outside of the home?

TD: Outside of the home.

RB: Okay.

TD: And the male was the principal breadwinner.

RB: I see. And what do you remember about your mother, you know, growing up as a child?

TD: My mother and father had a very happy home. There was a lot of love in that home and my father worked for his brother-in-law for most of his life in the fish business. Incidentally, the two originals that had come to this country, Solomon Calvo and Nessim Alhadeff built very large fish businesses. So—

RB: And those were in the Pike Place Market. Is that—

TD: No, they were on the waterfront.

RB: Okay.

TD: They were on the waterfront.

RB: Thanks for—

TD: The Pike Place Market is the retail outlets that other people went into.

RB: I see. Okay.

TD: Ya.

RB: That's great. And so—

TD: But these two gentlemen were the builders of their own companies.

RB: For wholesale fish marketing.

TD: For wholesale and retail, and Nessim Alhadeff went on to buy a fishing fleet and, of course, you know, the children moved into the businesses also and they developed and enlarged the business in both cases in both companies.

RB: I see. And so the women—their role was really critical in maintaining the home and family.

TD: Homemaker.

RB: Homemaker, uh-huh. What did they tell you about the relationship between the Ashkenazic community and the Sephardic community during those early years when you were first born and—

TD: They never mentioned too much about it. They never mentioned—they never spoke about it because they were so involved in their own group. Somehow or other when the family started coming in they all stayed together in one area. They all lived close to each other so that there was really no need for any outside interest, so that they had enough interest in their own group and in their own life.

RB: I see. And so the Sephardic community had a pretty close knit insulated community or neighborhood? Is that—

TD: They did. They lived close together. My mother said that now in the building that I was born in there were quite a few families that lived in that building. It was a big apartment complex on 12th and King and there were many, it was all filled by all the people that had come either from Rhodes or for Istanbul, so that they all lived close together. They knew each other.

RB: That's wonderful. And the synagogue or their place of worship was close by. Is that right? And everything was—what were the landmarks?

TD: You know, they used to rent space at the Washington Hall, which was on 14th and Fir for their holiday services. And they had some people that had come that were not the—well, they were not the ordained individuals that could conduct a service. But they were well read and they knew all there was to know to guide the group into their—into a

service for the Holy Days and for the holidays and for the general days, the daily services if they preferred that. But most of them were trying to make a living so there was not too much of the daily service. It was really more on Saturdays on the Shabbat—

RB: I see.

TD: —that they had a service.

RB: And what role did the women play? You know, what kinds of things did women do within the home then?

TD: Well, I can only speak for my mother, and she was the manager of everything that was to be done in the home. And she was—well, she guided us and she—my father was working, so she was at home and she was the one that guided us. She was the one that taught us that—well, like when my brother was playing football she would throw whatever coin she had on hand. There wasn't too much money at the time. She'd throw it in there hoping that he wouldn't be injured in playing football. And so [chuckles] that was for charity, and so that was the way that we saw where charity would go.

RB: Isn't that something? Did you consider your parent's role models?

TD: Definitely.

RB: In what way?

TD: There was kindness and compassion. They gave us the—they taught us the better things in life.

RB: Such as? What do you mean?

TD: That people should have an education and even though they couldn't afford to send us to college—we had to work if we wanted to go to college. We had to work to make

that money to be able to go to college, and so they taught us to do the right thing and to be kind and to be good.

RB: That's lovely. Wonderful. What do you remember about your childhood?

TD: Well, I was the first child in the—in my mother's family, and so—my mother was the oldest in her family—so that everyone reverted to her. They had brought my grandmother to America and so I was highly loved.

RB: That's wonderful. Do you remember any fun stories about your childhood?

TD: Well, I had a few stories.

RB: Ya, we'd loved to hear them.

TD: I didn't speak a word of English until I was—until after I was five years old.

RB: What did you speak, for those outside of Seattle?

TD: I spoke Ladino Spanish because that was the only language I knew. I spoke Spanish with my family, with my relatives and with the surrounding people that were living close by, because they spoke the same language that I was taught.

RB: That's wonderful.

TD: And so when I was sent to school at five years of age to go to kindergarten I didn't speak a word of English. And I was at a loss so the teacher pinned a note on my lapel and sent me back and said to go home, which I did. And my mother didn't read English so she asked someone who was just going—who had come to this country and was going to school and this is another thing; they didn't have schools in the Old Country—to read the note. And he read it and he said that she can't go back to school until she learns English. At that time they didn't have the bilingual teachers; they didn't have anything of

that sort of thing. Well, how could they? So my mother went across the street to a woman who was married to a gentleman from Rhodes. She was from Istanbul, Turkey and she had gone to the American school in Istanbul. She spoke English fluently and she spoke it without an accent, and her name was Dora Cohen.

RB: How do you spell her name—her last name?

TD: C-o-h-e-n. And she said to her, “What am I going to do? Look at this note.” And she said, “You send your daughter out every morning—out of the house and I’m going to send my daughter, Rachel, out and she’ll teach her because she knows Spanish and she’ll teach her. And that’s exactly how I learned. And we have been friends for the past 85 years. [laughter]

RB: Isn’t that marvelous?

TD: We have been friends. We don’t get to see each other because I don’t drive off the island and she doesn’t drive off Seattle [chuckles] so—but we do continue our—we do call each other up.

RB: What was Rachel’s last name, or what is it now?

TD: Well, it’s Israel now. The last name is Israel. She married a gentleman in—somewhere in Rhodesia, I think it was. And then he passed away and so she came back to the States. She had been there on a vacation on a trip and she met this gentleman and they were married.

RB: Wow!

TD: And then when he passed away she came back home, so like I say, for a few years that we were in different locale we didn’t get to see each other or talk to each other, but we were—we have been friends for the past 85 years. [chuckles]

RB: Oh, that's marvelous. And she helped teach you English—

TD: Yes, she taught me English.

RB: —through play. That's marvelous. So then you went back to school for first grade?

TD: For first grade. And I went back with her and I did everything with her. Everything. I mean, I went to school all the way through the seventh grade with her, and then we moved to 31st and Spruce, which was in the Leschi School District, so that I went for my eighth grade to Leschi and she continued at Washington.

RB: I see.

TD: At that time Washington was a grade school.

RB: Okay. Now, when your family moved to 31st and Spruce what was that neighborhood like in Seattle? What—who lived—who were your neighbors and—

TD: Well, my mother's sister lived directly across the street from her. Then next to her was my mother's brother and his wife and family. And then next to her was her first cousin and her husband and family. And then the others on the street were a mix of—they were—there was one Ashkenazic family and the rest were all of the Christian faith.

RB: But your immediate neighbors were extended family.

TD: That's right. And it seems like the Sephardics always stayed very close to each other. The families stayed very close to each other.

RB: Was there much interaction with Ashkenazim or non-Jewish people?

TD: The boys did because they were athletically inclined and so they would be playing with the Ashkenazic and the non-Jewish boys. And—but otherwise there wasn't any

contact with them.

RB: So for girls there was much less contact with those outside of the Sephardic community?

TD: Right.

RB: I see. And what about in school? Were girls and boys tracked differently in school?

TD: No, we were set just as they are today, all depending on what your grades are and how you managed to do things.

RB: Did Sephardic girls, when you were growing up—were they involved in any other extracurricular activities?

TD: Yes, we had a group. There was a place called the Educational Center and it was very similar to what the JCC is, only in a smaller scale. But the director there helped us organize a boy's group and a girl's group, so that there would be chances of meeting each other and having contacts.

RB: That's wonderful. Do you remember what kinds of activities you—

TD: Well, the activities there were not athletic. It was really more social. The—whereas if you go to the JCC now they have a big Olympic swimming pool. They have a lot of gymnasium, so that there's a lot of things that people can do.

RB: Yes. So there was less at the Educational Center but it really was great?

TD: But it was a big stronghold and kept the people together.

RB: That's wonderful.

TD: Ya, and they stayed together. They stayed together.

RB: The Jews that met there?

TD: Yes, they stayed together.

RB: Through the synagogue or through—

TD: Through—no, through the Center—through the Educational Center.

RB: I see.

TD: The synagogue didn't play quite as much of a role as it does today where they have groups of young people that meet together, or that go to a class together. At that time they didn't have bat mitzvahs for girls. At that time it was only bar mitzvahs for boys. And the instructors were the teachers were the ones that were leaders—that were leaders of the synagogues—the two respective synagogues, the Bikur Holim and the Ezra Bessaroth. Like, the rabbi at Bikur Holim would take care of his group and the reverend, who was Reverend Behar, would teach the boys from the Ezra Bessaroth group.

RB: And so, what did the girls do?

TD: Well, there—they planned their own activities. I mean, there was not much that they could do as far as—I know that I went to what we called cheder. And I went to the Ezra Bessaroth and Reverend Behar was my teacher, and what he would do is he would tell us Bible stories and he taught us how to read Hebrew.

RB: For the girls.

TD: For the girls.

RB: And how often did you attend—

TD: Well, it was after school, after day school. And so we would go maybe two days a week or three days at the most, maybe on a—two days during the week and on a Sunday morning or something.

RB: And the boys would go about the same amount of time, do you—

TD: The boys would go about the same time. The only thing is when they were going to be studying for their bar mitzvah they had to go a little bit more often, because they had to learn to read the Hebrew. Some of them even learned to read from the Torah. I mean, there is a difference between reading from a book and the Torah.

RB: Now, at a certain point I learned that you went to Temple De Hirsch Religious School.

TD: Yes, I did. When I was 15—no, 13 and I had no way of—we didn't have any bat mitzvah so Mr. Franco said to my mother, "Why don't you let me take Matilda to temple?" And so my mother said, "Well, I'm not a member of the temple." "That's okay. I will take care of it," he said. So I was enrolled at Temple De Hirsch for two years, from 13 until I was 15, and then I was confirmed in the class of 1925. And who do you think was confirmed with me?

RB: Tell us.

TD: My good friend, Rae Cohen [chuckles] and also, there was another Sephardic in the class, Emma Adatto. I think she's gone and she's—she was Emma Schlesinger.

RB: That was some confirmation class.

TD: Ya. [laughter] But we were the three Sephardics that were confirmed in that class.

RB: Do you remember approximately how large that confirmation class was?

TD: Oh, it was quite large. It was—don't forget that it contained a great majority of the Reform Temple members, and then there were a few Ashkenazics that also wanted to be a part of the temple and then the three of us, the three Sephardics.

RB: Was it Marco Franco that asked your mother?

TD: Yes, Marco Franco.

RB: Dorothy—

TD: Dorothy's—

RB: Dorothy Muscatel's—

TD: —father.

RB: Okay.

TD: But he happens to be married to my mother's first cousin. [chuckles]

RB: So—

TD: And so, I mean, there was a close bond between them. When he came to this country he stayed with my mother because there was—you know, he stayed with my mother and father because that's the way they would get started. How were they going to get started? They'd come here without any money, so they'd come in and they'd go to work right away. Somehow or other they found jobs.

RB: And they took care of each other.

TD: And they took care of each other.

RB: So it sounds like for the women those days, like your mother, they were not only taking care of their own immediate families but often—

TD: They took care of surrounding relatives.

RB: That immigrated.

TD: That immigrated, and even some that weren't even relatives.

RB: Isn't that something? So what was it like for your parents to send you to temple out—to have you leave the community a bit—just a bit to attend—

TD: Well, the attendance that we had was only on Sundays and Uncle Marco would take us to temple. And he would—we lived right across the street so he'd pick me up and take me over there, and he would take my brothers too. My brother, Joe, also went and at that time we had a Rabbi Koch, who was the rabbi at Temple de Hirsch and such a fine gentleman. He came to visit every confirmand's family that afternoon, and he said to my mother, "I have been watching your son, Joseph. I would like to take him under my wing and I would like to make him a rabbi." And at that time rabbis didn't make too much money. [laughs] And my mother said, "No, no."

RB: But he was very impressed.

TD: He was very impressed with my brother.

RB: Now, you—tell me how many siblings you have.

TD: I have three brothers and they're all younger than I am.

RB: What are their names and when were they born?

TD: My brother, Joseph, was born in 1913—June 4. My brother, Jack, was born July 1, 1917 and my brother, Morris, that you know as Sharkey—

RB: Yes.

TD: —was born August the 7th in 1920. [chuckles]

RB: So you were the big sister.

TD: I was the big sister.

RB: And what was your relationship like with your siblings growing up?

TD: Oh, we were very close.

RB: Were you treated any differently as the oldest daughter, or were the boys treated any differently from you?

TD: Well, the boys were—the Sephardic women always gave preference to the boys.

RB: How so? How so?

TD: Well, I don't know. For some reason or other they thought that the boys were very important. [laughs] And I can't say that I was neglected but somehow or other there was a different feeling towards a boy. Now, what it was I don't know, and maybe it was just only in my house that it was like that. Who knows? [laughs]

RB: Do you have any favorite childhood songs or stories or, you know, experiences that you would like to share?

TD: As far as songs are concerned, I have no voice so I never attempted to sing. [laughter]

RB: I'm sure it's much better than you think it is. [laughs]

TD: No, it was pretty bad. [laughter] So I couldn't really say that I would sing, that I would have a special song. I think that as I grew up—I mean, when I was around 17 and then I started listening to—I mean, I was aware of the trend of songs that were the today songs for everyone, Jews and non-Jews. So I would learn those songs.

RB: And that's what—

TD: And the first one that I can remember is "Bye, Bye Blackbird." [laughs]

RB: Is that right? That's great. When do you—when do you remember hearing that or what—

TD: Oh, I bought the—I bought the—at that time they used to print the songs. You know, they were—and so I bought the printing of it. And I used to play the piano so I would play it on the piano as far as I could. And then I would try to sing it but, oh God, that voice was not so good. [laughter]

RB: Oh, do you remember any favorite Ladino expressions or phrases that—

TD: Oh, we have so many. We have so many. It's—someone said to me, "How come Sephardic people always marry Sephardics?" And I said, "Well, there's a saying amongst the Sephardics." And shall I say it in Spanish?

RB: You know what? It would be great if you say it in Spanish and then translate it for us.

TD: Okay. "Di me de ande vienes, ti diero lo que sous. Tell me where you come from and I will tell you who you are."

RB: That's beautiful.

TD: That's the really one major song—major saying that I truthfully can say is so true to everything, because you know who you're marrying. You know what type of people

they are. You know that they're kind and good, or that they're the other way around and you try to avoid them. [laughs]

RB: That's a lovely—

TD: But there are many of our sayings—so many. I—offhand I can't remember sayings because—probably I'll remember them as soon as you leave. [laughter]

RB: Would you write them down and then—

TD: I will.

RB: —I'll come back. [chuckles]

TD: I will.

RB: Was your house—did you consider your house to be a—this is going to sound like a very funny question for you—but a Jewish home?

TD: Definitely.

RB: Tell us in what way.

TD: My mother was very orthodox, as was my father. And my mother observed every holiday to the nth degree. Came Passover, she had to order from the Jewish grocery store. They had a Jewish grocery store. And she would order soap that had a Jewish star and she would order milk that had the label that it was kosher. She would order everything that she possibly needed from them, because then she knew that she was getting the kosher and the paerve.

RB: And how was Shabbat celebrated at your house?

TD: Shabbat was celebrated on Friday night because Shabbat my father worked. But Friday night my father would—we would have dinner in the dining room. Usually, we ate in the kitchen but then on Friday night we had dinner in the dining room, and on Friday night we had a full course dinner. We had the fish and salad and the chicken and the rice and the vegetable. And it was an evening that—and then my father would say the kiddush to start out with, and then he would—I'm really sorry that we never—now, he had a good voice. I'm sorry we never taped his Passover service and his kiddush service. But anyhow he would say the kiddush and the ha motzi and then we would start eating. So it was—and the family had to be together. That was the primary request that everyone had to be there and we all sat together for dinner.

RB: Sounds like a really beautiful, special—

TD: Yes, Friday—ya, Friday night—Friday evening service was always the evening that we had—

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TD: —together.

RB: Were there any special foods that were prepared for any of the holidays that you can remember?

TD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. On Passover they always made the meginas.

RB: Could you describe that for us?

TD: Well, it's really like—a megina is like a meat pie and it has a bottom layer of matzahs and a top layer of matzahs and the meat in between. And it was more like a pie; it really was. And then we had—we would make our fish with lemon and egg and serve it with that sauce. And chicken was chicken; it was baked. Vegetables—oh, I know

something that would be interesting. My mother had a habit of—because of the fact that it was tough raising four children and you're on a limited income, so she would buy meat. She'd buy, say, x number of pounds of chuck meat and she would put a piece of the meat and cook it with the vegetable and then she would add some rice to it. And that would give you the—your protein, your vegetable and your starch. And my brother—one of my brothers who had been going to—with one of our cousins—who had been—always been a part of a—the group that went together, and they would go to visit one person's home. And their mother used to cook each food separately, the meat separate, the vegetable separate and the rice separate. And my brother would come home and they'd say, "Why don't you cook like, Auntie Matilda?" And my mother says, "Eat now," because she would only put a piece of meat in there and it had to go for the whole family, and so they had to eat. [laughter] And so they eventually changed their style of cooking too and they were eventually changed to keeping the meat separate and the vegetable separate. [laughs]

RB: Isn't that—

TD: Just in case they didn't want—they didn't want one thing.

RB: Did your mother do much baking?

TD: Quite a bit.

RB: What did she bake?

TD: Well, she baked bread for most of the week, although she did buy bread. There were times when she'd buy bread. Well, we had a deliveryman that came around and one day my brother said to my mother, "Why don't we have dessert in this house? We never have any dessert here." And she says, "What's dessert?" And so he says, "You know, like apple pie." "Oh, that's okay." So, when the bread man came around she said, "Do you have any apple pie?" And he said, "Sure." She says, "Bring me one." So she

bought one that day. And he had apple pie that evening. [chuckles] The next time the bakery delivery came she said, “Bring me an apple pie.” So for 30 days she kept buying apple pies until my brother said, “Dessert is not only apple pie.” “You told me apple pie.” [laughter]

RB: Now, isn’t there a funny expression about apple pie?

TD: Yes, there is. Apple pie de manzana. [laughter]

RB: Where does that come from?

TD: I don’t know. Someone started that. [laughs]

RB: Can you translate that for people?

TD: Okay, it’s apple pie of apples. [laughs]

RB: Okay. Now, your grandmother came over in what year?

TD: Well, my maternal grandmother came in 1913. My paternal grandmother came in 1940. I think she came on the last boat that left the Island of Rhodes. And she must have been in her—oh, she must have been in her late 80s—close to 90 when she came.

RB: My goodness!

TD: And she lived here for about five or six years.

RB: And what do you remember about your grandmothers?

TD: Which ones? My maternal grandmother would always tell us stories. She had a big backlog of stories that she would tell us and then my—

RB: What were the stories about?

TD: Well, they were stories that kept us entertained. In other words, they'd be stories about Joha.

RB: Could you describe this because I've been hearing about this?

TD: Well—

RB: I'd love to hear more about it.

TD: Joha was a person that didn't think too well and so he would do things that only a person with less than normal brains would do. [chuckles] And so that consequently, there were a lot of stories about Joha. [laughs] Now, whether they were made up or not I can't tell.

RB: Do you remember any of them?

TD: Well, one of them was that Joha had gotten engaged and that evening after dinner a big storm developed. So the mother of the bride said to him, "Joha, you better stay here tonight and sleep here tonight because you shouldn't be going home." So he said, "Okay." So he figured, "Well, I didn't bring pajamas." So he went home, picked up his pajamas, came back. [laughs] That was one of the Joha stories.

RB: And so, did many of the stories have moral lessons for you?

TD: Well, some of them—some of them had moral lessons.

RB: I see.

TD: Some of them did have. There was one story that my grandmother used to tell.

RB: You could actually tell it in Ladino if you'd like and then translate it. We would love to hear it, if you would like. It's up to you.

TD: Well, let me see if I can remember it. It was so many years ago. You know, this is way back. I'm going back to 1919, 1920; that's a long time ago. [laughter] And there was one story that she said was something about Hodja—Hodja—Hodja.

RB: Ya, Hodja is the wise man, is that right?

TD: Ya.

RB: And Joha is the fool [unclear].

TD: Is the fool, right, so, anyhow, Hodja. His sons were arguing and they all said, "I'm going to have this. I'm going to take this," when their father was going to go. He—this one was going to have this. This one was going to have that. So Hodja said, "I will fix them." So he said, "I have a hat in the trunk and I'm going to fill it for all of you, and then you can divide it." But they—he didn't tell them what he was going to fill it with. And so he filled it. He filled it with things that were of no value. And so when he died they could hardly contain themselves. They wanted to get to the trunk to open up that trunk and find the hat that was filled with all—in the meantime, the—Hodja had given away to the—to his synagogue all his things. And he had left just a few things for the children. When they opened it up and they saw how little they got, then they realized that their father was the wise man, and that he didn't want any arguments after he had gone, so that whatever was left was not important.

RB: Hmm, that's a pretty good story.

TD: So that was one story that I remember. And, I mean, there were so many that she told us because we would sit there by the hour and she'd tell us all—there—"One more story, Grandma; one more story."

RB: Was this during the week or on Shabbat or—

TD: Oh, it was always on a Saturday night.

RB: Okay, isn't that—

TD: After Shabbat.

RB: After Shabbat. Okay. Do you know how—was this common among Sephardic families to tell these stories?

TD: I think so. I think so because the grandparents would tell these—were really more like babysitters. You know, the younger adults would get together and play cards together and that sort of thing, so the grandmother would round up all the grandchildren and tell them the stories, because they went to everybody's house. At that time there were no babysitters, so children all had to come with the parents, and so they—no matter where they were going, whether it was a wedding or not, the children went with the parents.

RB: Isn't that something? And then the grandparents would—

TD: Took care of them.

RB: Would take care of them. That's great.

TD: It—but now the grandparents want to be entertaining themselves now. [chuckles]

RB: So times have changed—

TD: Right.

RB: —in that regard. Yes.

TD: Well, now they have babysitters. [chuckles]

RB: What about your paternal grandmother?

TD: She was in her late ‘80s and she came in on the last boat that came from the Island of Rhodes, which was from Pareos, Greece. What happened was that my aunt had sent papers of—to my cousin in order to bring her to America because the—she had written my aunt and—which would be her aunt also. She had written her and told her that she must get out, otherwise she’s going to lose her life because the word was that Mussolini was joining up with Hitler. And if that took place then they would be wiped out; they’d be sent to concentration camps. So my aunt went ahead and sent her the necessary papers to come to this country. And her name was Matilda, the same as mine, and she was named for my grandmother. But her mother was very sick and she couldn’t leave her mother; she just couldn’t leave her. So she said to my grandmother, “You take my papers; your name is the same. You take my papers and you go to America.” And that’s what happened. She came all the way from the Island of Rhodes to New York and my aunt sent one of her sons to go pick up her mother and bring her to Seattle. By the way, my grandmother had a beautiful voice. Now, I don’t know why I didn’t have the voice but my grandmother did have a beautiful voice and there was a young man from Spain who had gone to the Island of Rhodes many years before. And he was doing for his doctorate—he was doing a paper on ballads of the Sephardics. And he came to the Island of Rhodes and he asked who would be a person that he could contact to hear some of those ballads. I have the book here. And I have the printing of the article and I have the article that this doctor—he eventually received his doctorate. Anyhow, he listened to my grandmother and he picked up all her songs that she had to sing, because at that time they were looking for information on the Sephardim that had been exiled from Spain. So— and naturally, they knew that they had songs that they had carried with them. I’ll show it to you after we finish this.

RB: That would be marvelous.

TD: And so—so you see, the Sephardics have a very good background. [laughs] So in any case, when he went—so he went back to Spain and he got his doctorate and was teaching at one of the universities there and—after the war—World War II he went to—back to the Island of Rhodes. And he was looking for my grandmother and there were no more Jews left there. So they said, "Oh, she's probably gotten killed." So he wrote a song in her memory.

RB: Really?

TD: Uh-huh.

RB: Do you have—

TD: I have that too.

RB: And is it recorded or—

TD: No, it's just in the book. And so—but then there was a fellow in New York that was in contact with this doctor—this professor. And he was sitting next to my cousin at the Portuguese temple, the—I can't think of the name of the temple. But anyhow, it's the old Portuguese temple in New York. And so—it's the one that Rabbi Mark Angel is rabbi of. And so he said to my cousin—he said, "Do you know"—he says, "Your name is Israel. Do you know a woman by the name of Mazeltov Israel?" "Oh," he says. "That's my grandmother." He told him about this young man, how he had gone to Rhodes and gotten all the songs from her and how he had gone back and that she had—and he was looking for her and she was not there, and they said that she had probably died. So he said, "She didn't die. She came to America." He says, "She's in Seattle, Washington. My aunt brought her to America." So that's the story of my grandmother. She was 96 when she died but she was here for about seven or eight years.

RB: Did she sing for you here?

TD: I heard her sing one of her songs and everyone used to sing her songs, because she was such a—she was a charming woman and she was a—and she had a very good voice, and she had a good memory, and she knew all these songs. And these songs were trans—how do you say that? They were passed on from one generation to another. In other words, the original people came from Spain and settled—see, the original people were turned down by everyone except the sultan of Turkey—from the sultan of the Ottoman Empire. And he's the one that accepted the Sephardics, because he figured if the Jews had given Spain the Golden Age then they could give Turkey the Golden Age. So he brought—he accepted them. And then some of them left Istanbul. Some of them stayed in Istanbul. Some of them left Istanbul and went to the Island of Rhodes. And so that's where you find the difference. So it was a matter of generation after generation.

RB: That's just beautiful.

TD: So maybe I've gone off the subject but [chuckles]—

RB: No, I think it's great background to share with us. It's wonderful. Let's see. So you—it sounds like you had both a solid secular and Jewish education. Is that how you [unclear]—

TD: Yes, I did.

RB: Uh-huh. And did you attend classes at the University of Washington?

TD: Yes, I did.

RB: Could you tell us a little bit about that experience?

TD: Well, there was a—I entered in 1928, in October of '28 and I was there for the full year but I had to work in order to—even though the tuition was very minimal. [chuckles] I think it was around $15 a quarter but then we had to pay $10 for an ASUW

card. [chuckles] And that was—I mean, and then you had to buy clothes, and you had to buy books, and you had to buy—so I was working and going to school but it was tough. At that time, I don't know, everyone was getting married and I kept thinking, 'Oh, gosh, I'm an oddball.' [chuckles]

RB: Is that right? At what age were women getting married back then?

TD: At that time the girls would get out of school—high school when they were 17 or 18 and whatever their—you know, whatever age they were. And shortly thereafter they would get married.

RB: Without—within the Sephardic community?

TD: Within the Sephardic community.

RB: And so a few of them went on to the University of Washington, is that—

TD: Not too many. The only ones that went to the University—there was—Emma Adatto was at the University and I think she graduated. Mrs. Adatto Senior, the mother, was very, very much interested in seeing that her—all her children received a high education. I mean, she—she must have been a remarkable lady—I mean, to have done that for her children.

RB: Right.

TD: And don't forget that at that time the men didn't make that much money. I think her husband was a tailor. I mean, it was really tough going. I mean, everyone had to work.

RB: Right. And so you were there—let's see, it was during the Depression, is that right?

TD: Well, I was there in 1928—

RB: Okay.

TD: —until 1930 and then I decided—I had not taken any business courses when I was going to high school. I had taken all courses that would take me into the university, so I had taken Latin and chemistry and algebra and geometry and all those subjects that are necessary to enter the university. And so I left the university and I went to a business school and I became a bookkeeper. And then I started working and then was able to make $16 a week. [chuckles]

RB: But you had a trade and a skill, a profession.

TD: Ya, ya.

RB: What was—on campus what was it like?

TD: Well.

RB: Excuse me. Tillie, do you mind if I stop the tape for just a moment? I want to check the battery on the microphone, okay?

TD: Sure.

RB: Thank you. Tillie, we were just talking about your early college years and that you went to business college from the University of Washington. What made you leave the University of Washington?

TD: I couldn't keep up the pace of studying and working. It was just too difficult. In other words, I would be picked up in the morning at seven to go to work and I would work 'til eight o'clock. And then I—if I had an eight o'clock class I would have to be there a few minutes before. But at that time you could drive through the campus. [chuckles]

RB: Is that right? [chuckles]

TD: Right. You can't do that now but you could do it then. And my class was at Meany Hall, so the driver could drive me right—at eight o'clock he could—he'd pick me up at three minutes to eight and drive me right to—in front of the building. So I was able to make my classes in time, but I was running and going up the stairs to get there.

RB: And who was the driver?

TD: It was one of my uncles. I worked for my uncle as a—working in his office and the driver was one of his drivers that would pick me up in the morning at seven to bring me to work. And I would make the deposit and have it already for somebody to take it to the bank, and then I would go on to my classes. And it was just tough. It was really tough.

RB: Were you a member of a sorority at the university?

TD: No, at that time [chuckles]—

RB: What do you mean, at that time?

TD: At that time, who had money to go to a sorority? [chuckles]

RB: Right, it was expensive just going to school.

TD: Right.

RB: Yes.

TD: It was all I could do to pay tuition and books. [chuckles]

RB: So what was your experience like at the business college?

TD: Well, the business college was a means to an end. It really was a means to an end. I would sometimes feel that I should have stuck to college. I should have been a little stronger. But, you know, I was young at that time and I didn't think that it would be

of any value, but it would have been of value. So I should have stayed.

RB: It sounds like it was a—financially though in those days—

TD: Well, it was financial because not too many people could afford to go. You know, my father earned—and this was big bucks, I mean, that he earned. He earned $25 a week. And that was supposed to be a good income at that time.

RB: Yes.

TD: But it was enough to feed us and clothe us. But my mother couldn't do anymore than that. And my three brothers had to work their way through school; they really did. My brother, Joe, became a pharmacist and my brother, Jack, was a meteorologist, and Sharkey was going on to law school. In fact, he had one year of law and then he dropped out of law school. But he's a good businessman.

RB: Yes, he is. Now, let's see. Shortly after you were at the College of Business you decided to move to California. Is that right?

TD: Well, not right after that. It was about two years after I was working or three years after I was working I went on a—two years after I was working I went on a vacation to California and I met the man that I eventually married. And I thought, 'Oh, I like him.' And so I decided—so I came back to Seattle and I worked for another year. And then I had my vacation coming and I told my employer that I didn't think I was going to come back, that I was going to stay in California. And at that time for a girl to go on her own independently and go to another city and take an apartment was unheard of. But my mother was very liberal and—

RB: Excuse me, Tillie. You know what I'm going to do? Because this is a great place to start on our second tape. We have to end this tape. Okay, so I'll be right back with you, okay.

TD: Okay.

[END of SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

RB: Hi. We're back. This is Roz Bornstein. It's still May 24, 2001 and I'm continuing the oral history of Tillie DeLeon at Tillie's home on Mercer Island, Washington. Tillie, do I still have your permission to interview you and tape you?

TD: Yes.

RB: Thank you. You were describing making a decision to move to California. And could you tell us about that, how old you were and all the—you know, all about the experience?

TD: Well, let's see. That was in 1936. I was 26 years old at the time and I decided to move to California, and one of my girlfriends was living down there. So the two of us decided we'd take an apartment together; we couldn't afford it separately but we could afford it together, because at that time our salaries were $16 a week. So—which we did and I met the man that I eventually married and knew that I was glad that I had made the change that I had come to Los Angeles. And so in 1940 he brought his family from the island of Rhodes. He brought seven of them to Los Angeles and he brought a mother, and a brother and sister-in-law and three children, and also a younger brother. So he brought seven of them all at one time.

RB: That's remarkable.

TD: Ya, it was really something. And at that time, you know, it isn't that anyone had a lot of money or had a good income tax return, because they weren't really making that much. But now it's a different story but at that time it was different.

RB: A lot. Yes. Tell—could we take a step back just for a few minutes and then we'll come back to this story of how he brought them over. I'm curious to know what it was like as a young woman to leave your close knit community here in Seattle. What was the response here and how did you feel?

TD: Well, I felt that I had to make a change, that I wasn't making any headway in Seattle.

RB: In what way?

TD: Well, in financial. That was number one. And secondly, socially. All my friends were getting married and, outside of my first girlfriend that I referred to before, and then others that I—other friends that I had recently become friendly with. So it was a natural thing for us to make a change and so we did. [chuckles]

RB: How was it telling your family about your decision to move? What was that like?

TD: My mother said that—to me, "Whatever you want to do, I trust you. So if you want to live there I trust you." And that was—and so I had to bear that in mind.

RB: What do you mean?

TD: Well, I had to be—preserve my own integrity, so that consequently, I mean, eventually I married that gentleman and—

RB: What was it like moving down there? What—was there a community that you—

TD: Oh, there was a big community there.

RB: A Sephardic or Ashkenazic—

TD: A Sephardic.

RB: Okay.

TD: Most Sephardic. Your know, Sephardics seemed to stay together for some reason or other. I don't know why but they do.

RB: And so you took an apartment in a Sephardic neighborhood?

TD: No, we took it in a—Los Angeles is a big city and it was an area which was close to transportation—very close to transportation—very close to—so that it wouldn't take too long to get downtown, because most of the activities, most of the businesses were downtown, so that it wouldn't take too long to get downtown. So that's why we moved to an area where it wasn't close to any of the Sephardics, but then it was close for us to our positions or our jobs. And it was close to transportation.

RB: How did you find your job?

TD: I had worked in a jewelry store here in Seattle. So I walked into a jewelry store in Los Angeles, which was one of the larger stores and applied. And this is interesting. I told them that I would like to work as a cashier, and this was in 1936. And they—the business was owned and operated by two brothers of the Jewish faith, and they took me to one side and they said, "We have a big office upstairs where we need people for telephone shopping, mail shopping, credit investigations. But the downstairs we reserve for non-Jewish help—girls—non-Jewish girls because there's a lot of antisemitism," and so I accepted it. And I felt that they must know what they're talking about, and at that time there was antisemitism in 1936—not openly but some of the bigger companies would withhold hiring Jewish people—Jewish personnel at that time.

RB: What impact did that have on you?

TD: Well, it made me realize that they must know what they're talking about. Like I say, the people must know what they're doing because they had a big business and so that—when they—and I noticed who they had on the floor, on the main floor. Then I knew that they were telling me the truth. And then I had heard that one of the big banks down

there was—would never hire Jewish girls for their offices or for their fronts.

RB: Was this your first experience with antisemitism?

TD: It was.

RB: So there wasn't—you didn't feel it growing up in Seattle?

TD: Well, no, because I was growing up in a smaller city. You find that only in the bigger cities.

RB: And it sounds as though you were more insulated within the Sephardic community in Seattle as a child. Is that—?

TD: That's right. That's right.

RB: I see. Were you surprised or shocked to be in that situation, that—

TD: No, because I had heard of it. I knew that it was there. But it was only after World War II that things changed to some degree—not entirely, but to some degree.

RB: In what way? What change did you notice?

TD: Well, I noticed that there was an acceptance. But now, many times I would be on the streetcar going home and right behind me would be, say, two little old ladies who were talking and they'd be pointing out the various stores. "See, now, that's owned by a Jewish company. Now, that one is owned by a Jewish company." And they would point out the stores that they knew were owned by Jewish companies.

RB: These were Jewish women or not Jewish women?

TD: Non-Jewish.

RB: Non, and in Los Angeles?

TD: In Los Angeles.

RB: I see. Isn't that something?

TD: Ya.

RB: What was the work culture like within this jewelry store? Did the people upstairs, the Jewish people mix with the—

TD: Oh, yes.

RB: Okay, so—

TD: There was no—there was no feeling of antagonism towards the front office. It wasn't—

RB: Or vice versa?

TD: Or vice versa.

RB: I see. It's just in hiring.

TD: In fact, the fact that I spoke Spanish and it being great Latino country there they would call me down to come and be an interpreter for some of the people that came in to buy glasses—you know, to be fitted for glasses because they had an optometry department there. And so I would go down and interpret for them. And so—

RB: What was the name of the store?

TD: It was—I'd rather not say.

RB: Okay. Okay, no problem. Let's see. How did you meet your first husband?

TD: Well, I met him through a cousin of mine. A cousin of mine had—I had stopped in San Francisco and this cousin of mine says, “Now, if you’re going to go on to Los Angeles I’m going to write Al and tell him to make sure that you get to see the city.” And so when I got to Los Angeles I looked him up and he said, “Oh, I have a letter from Billy and he told me that I should take you around and show you the city.” And he said, “What are you doing on Sunday?” And that started the ball rolling. [chuckles]

RB: Isn’t that something?

TD: Yes.

RB: Can you tell us a little bit about your courtship? What was that like?

TD: Well, it was Depression years and he had just started a business and he didn’t want to get married because, after all, he said he couldn’t give the woman that he was going to marry everything that he would like to give her, that she should have a good life. So I think that I waited for him until things got better and still went with him, and so that eventually we got married.

RB: Isn’t that something? And what were the circumstances of your marriage? Were you married in Los Angeles or Seattle?

TD: No, we were married in Los Angeles. We were married in a civil ceremony and—in Orange County and then we came back to Los Angeles that same day and so my husband told his mother, “Well, we did it.” And so she said, “You didn’t have a Jewish wedding?” And so he said, “No, we went to the—we had a civil ceremony.” “Oh, you’ve got to have a Jewish wedding.” And so we went to a rabbi’s study and had the wedding, had the family there. The entire family was there—that is, his entire family and then when my mother heard that I got married she was thrilled beyond words. And as long—and she knew who I was marrying and she was just more thrilled about it [laughs]

RB: Did she know his family?

TD: Ya.

RB: Uh-huh, so it was another Sephardic family?

TD: Right.

RB: And did you have a honeymoon or what was your—

TD: Well, we didn't have a honeymoon right away because we got married in December, and it was the first of the year, and he had a lot of things to take care of. So in June we were going to a convention in New York, so that was our honeymoon.

RB: Was that—I mean, it sounds like a big trip for back then.

TD: Oh, it was wonderful. [laughs]

RB: Ya. How so? What do you remember of that trip?

TD: Oh, well, I remember the fact that we were going by plane, and my husband said, "I think we should go and make our wills because you never know about planes." So we went to the bank and we made our wills and we went on our trip to New York by plane, and it was fine. Everything went along great. And he had a sister living in New York, in Queens, and so we were there one week in New York. And then we went one week to visit his sister in Queens. And everything was just great and I had a wonderful life for the 10 years that I was married to him. It was absolutely beautiful.

RB: What do you remember about those years that stand out?

TD: Well, it was—how can I say? What can I say? I felt like I was in cloud nine all the time. I mean, he was just—he was the greatest guy and he took a great interest in my family. He was good to them. My parents came to visit me many times. Some of my

relatives came to visit and he went out of his way to be cordial and kind and nice. So he was congenial; he was just a great guy.

RB: Did you work during your—at that time?

TD: I worked only in the store.

RB: With—in his—

TD: Within his company.

RB: Okay.

TD: And so I worked there, oh, maybe three days a week or so, and then I had a few days to myself where I socialized and—

RB: Were the roles similar to those that you grew up with with your parents or did you—what were the roles in your married life then? Did you—were you mostly the homemaker or did you share?

TD: Well, I didn't have anything to do with the business itself because I think he made it very clear to me, and he said, "The business is run—I will run the business and you run the house. I will never interfere in anything you do in the house and I don't want you to interfere in anything I do in the business." And so that's the way we kept it. So as long as we kept it that way everything went along very smooth. [chuckles] So I had no problems.

RB: And as far as major decisions, you know, with finances or—was it shared, a shared responsibility, did you find or—

TD: Well, he would say to me, "I put the checks in the bank. You spend."

RB: So he—it sounds like he gave you a lot of latitude.

TD: Oh, yes.

RB: It sounds like you were both in partnership with being so generous and kind to people.

TD: Well, he was—he was really the one. He was the one that was so generous.

RB: And you supported that it sounds like.

TD: Yes, I did.

RB: Yes, that's wonderful. Now, he died in what year?

TD: He died in '53.

RB: In '53, and you were married in what year? I'm sorry.

TD: I was married in '43.

RB: Okay. So before you were married, in 1940, that's when he brought his family over.

TD: Mm-hmm.

RB: And you were dating at that time?

TD: That's right.

RB: And what was that like for you? What do you know of about why he brought his family over?

TD: Well, he brought them because he had gotten several letters from his brother that things were getting very, very close on the Island of Rhodes, that the Jews would be taken by the Nazis because of the fact that Mussolini had joined forces with Hitler. And he said, "It will not be too long before we'll all be wiped out. We'll all be taken to

concentration camps." And so he made it a point. He went to the bank and he had the bank co-sign— not the bank—the manager of the bank co-sign with him—and, at that time too, one of the vice presidents of Goodyear Tire—whoever—was very close to him. They liked him very, very much because he used to buy merchandise from them, and they liked how he operated. And so this one person said, "I will co-sign for you." This one vice president said, "I will co-sign to bring your family over."

RB: And was that your first—

TD: He was the first one I loved.

RB: Was that your first experience with the Holocaust or what—

TD: Well, and then his sister-in-law, the one that he brought over, had 28 members of her family that were taken by the Nazis and killed. They were lost in the concentration camp. And, I mean, so then you know—you hear things about the—we didn't know the details. There was no correspondence that came through—couldn't come through. And—but we did know that she had lost 28 people—28 of her immediate family. That meant brothers and brother-in-laws and sisters and sister-in-laws and nephews and nieces that were all taken.

RB: What was your experience of being on the West Coast during the war? Did you experience the blackouts or—

TD: Well, I don't think we felt it that much. We really didn't feel it that much outside of the fact that they had the person that was on the street that would be watching for—like, you had to keep your lights out at a certain hour—that sort of thing. And if you had them on, why, they'd come knocking on your door. But then that didn't happen too often. So I don't think that we felt it too badly. I can't say that we felt it badly.

RB: Okay. Getting back to your marriage—I'm sorry, you kind of went off on a tangent there but your husband—can you tell us a little bit about the circumstances of his death and—

TD: Oh, well. He was Sephardic; you know that.

RB: Yes.

TD: His name was Alfred Aaron Russo and in 1952 we discovered that he had leukemia. And at that time there was no—there were not too many hematologists and there was not too much work being done on blood diseases. And so the doctor had told us that he could live his normal span of life providing he didn't overdo things. In other words, he shouldn't work and go out at night. It had to be either go out at night or work. So we decided that—and he decided that he would rather work than go out, which we did. And he had to be very careful because there was a tendency that the immune system was not there to fight off diseases. So he got a cold. It turned to pneumonia and that's what caused his death. So he was hospitalized for two months and then two months at home, and it was sad.

RB: How so? What was that like for you?

TD: Oh, it was like the end of the world. I thought that everything had closed up on me because I had had such a wonderful 10 years, and that was the end.

RB: That's really—and it sounds as though it was—even though you knew that the—that he had the illness, that the—it was fairly sudden—just took hold of him.

TD: Well, because of the fact that he had the pneumonia and that—once you get pneumonia and—you can't fight it, even in—even today, when they get pneumonia it's tough to—

RB: How did you manage at that time?

TD: Well, he left me in a position—see, he had become very successful. In the 10 years that I was married to him he was very successful, and he had left me financially independent, so that I didn't have to go to work. And then I would wake up every morning and I'd say, "Gosh, what am I going to do today? Why am I here?" I hadn't found myself. I couldn't find myself. I could have gone and done some social work but I had no one that would—that could guide me or direct me into the—into some direction until one day I had a call from a relative of mine. And she said, "Would you mind coming into our warehouse and helping us out? I have a lot of typing to be done and I wish you would come and help me." I said, "Sure. I have nothing to do." So I went down there. And then I went over there that day and as I'm doing a report for her she said to me, "Why don't you take a course in real estate?" And she says, "You've got a lot of ability. You might just as well use it." And she said, "You could work part time and you could still have your social life." So I thought, 'Well, that doesn't sound so bad. At least I'll have something to do.' So I did. I took my real estate course and then I went to a real estate office in my neighborhood where I lived and I applied for a job. And they took me; they accepted me but he said, "You know." He says, "I hesitate to hire widows because they usually have other things to do and they neglect the business." I said, "I won't neglect it." And so I worked for him for three years until I met my second husband and then I married and came up here.

RB: So you met your second husband in California as well?

TD: Well, I met him—I knew him from Seattle.

RB: I see.

TD: We had grown up together.

RB: I see.

TD: So I had known him and he—he was on the rebound from a divorce and I was lonely, so actually it wasn't that I was in love or anything. But it was just that it was a lonely life and so—and I didn't have children so that made a difference too.

RB: Wow! So you really have such a rich history in terms of what women can do and what—

TD: Well, then I worked—I worked real estate down there. Then when I came up here he decided to go into real estate. So I figured, well, two of us can't be in real estate, so let him do the real estate and I'll stay home, which I did. And then he worked real estate. And then he was—he wasn't a well person when I married him, and he made it very clear to me that he was not well. But I was lonely so I decided, it's okay, I can handle it.

RB: What was the name of your second husband.

TD: Albert DeLeon. And he had a daughter and eventually, two years after I married him she was married. And—

RB: [unclear]. We were talking about your marriage to—

TD: Albert DeLeon.

RB: Yes, yes.

TD: Okay. And he was—he had told me that he was a diabetic and I could—I could cope with that. So then about two years after I married Al his daughter was married. And that just left the two of us and his little dog. [laughs]

RB: That's great.

TD: So—

RB: What year were you married to him?

TD: To Al? I was married in 19—December of ’59.

RB: In Seattle?

TD: In Los Angeles—in Las Vegas.

RB: That’s great. Well, tell us about your marriage there.

TD: Well, he came down on a visit and we had been in correspondence. And he came down on a visit and so we met a friend of his down there, and they were going to Vegas for a few days, and so they asked us if we wanted to go. And so he said that would be a good opportunity for us to get married. And so we got married in Las Vegas. And then we came back to Los Angeles and decided that we were going to come back to his home here in Seattle because he had his daughter here. And she was close to 19 and he wanted to be with her. So we came back to Seattle and he went into the real estate business. And first he went into selling some Norge equipment and then after that he went into the real estate business. And I—when he got to the point where he was at home I felt that it would be wise for me to go out and work and be away from home, because otherwise you’re going to have friction. So I got a job at Frederick and Nelson doing telephone shopping, which I just loved.

RB: How so?

TD: And then when I was 65 Fredericks had a rule that at 65 you had to retire, so—now they changed—then they changed the ruling. After I left they changed the ruling to 70. By any—because people were really younger at that time than they were, say 20 or 30 years before that. So anyhow, I retired at 65 and I was doing a couple of days a week of volunteer work at Group Health until one day I thought to myself, ‘Why am I doing this? Why don’t I go out and get a job for three days a week or part time or something? And this way at least I’ll be doing something constructive.’ I was doing something constructive but, you know, it wasn’t quite the same. So I went to an

employment office and they gave me a test. And this gentleman was saying, “Oh, wonderful. You do everything and the statistical typing is perfect. Your math is perfect.” And he’s going on and on and so I said, “Okay, when do you want me to come back?” [chuckles] And so he said—just as he was going to say something somebody walked in and this woman said, “I need a secretary receptionist in a hurry. Right now.” And she walked out and I said, “Who’s she?” Says, “Well, she’s with (deleted), the real estate people. I said, “I’ve got a broker’s license.” I said, “I know all the terminology and you’ve been raving about how wonderful I am.” I said, “So why don’t you send me over there?” So he said, “Well, are you ready to go to work?” I said, “I’m all dressed up.” [laughter] So I went over there and I worked for the commercial manager of the (deleted). I worked with him for a year and a half. Then he decided to go into business for himself and I said to him, “I’m going with you.” And he took the whole office with him. And I was with him for 12 years and I retired when I was close to 80.

RB: That’s amazing.

TD: I worked 12 years with him and it was terrific.

RB: Is that right?

TD: Oh, 12 of the best working years I had.

RB: How so? What did you like about it?

TD: Well, he gave me carte blanche. I had freedom to do as I pleased. I—he would say to me, “Now, I want you to do the bookkeeping.” And I said, “Oh, I can’t do the bookkeeping for this business.” “Yes, you can.” He gave me self-esteem and that was important. Then we hired someone because it was getting a little bit too much for me. And as things progressed, why, we hired a full time girl; then we hired another full time girl. Then we hired a market researcher. And things that I used to do I couldn’t do anymore. I had to handle the bookkeeping end of it, and so I handled that and I’d send

the reports into the accounting office.

RB: And this was in your 70s? That was pretty—

TD: Oh, ya. I worked from the time that I was 67 until close to 80.

RB: That's amazing.

TD: And, in fact, I was 80 when I quit and the only reason that I left was because of my vision. I mean, I was having a tough time with my eyes. I mean, I had had a cataract surgery and then I had developed a situation where the one—where the cataract had been—the lens that had been put in was rejected by my cornea, and so it damaged my cornea and I had to have a cornea replacement. I had a cornea transplant. And then six months after that my cornea doctor went on a seminar and I got an infection, and the ophthalmologist didn't know how to work it. So they did the best they knew how and— but they couldn't do anything. And so I have lost a lot of vision in this eye.

RB: How has that affected you? Obviously, work-wise it affected you but how else?

TD: Well, the only thing is too as you get older your reflexes are not as quick as the younger person, so I feel that I can't drive outside of Mercer Island. I only drive from here—and this is only for my self-esteem. I spend a lot of money on my insurance and car and that sort of thing. But it's important to me for self-esteem, to be able to be independent and go to the market and get my things and come home. And that's as far as it goes. Or I go to the beauty shop.

RB: Yes, yes.

TD: And he was a friend. He was really a friend.

RB: Who are you referring to?

TD: To the people that I worked with.

RB: Yes. Well, it's been wonderful, you know, hearing about parts of your life and about the community.

TD: Oh, thank you.

RB: And I would love to come back and finish.

TD: Okay, whenever you want to come.

RB: Thank you so much. I'll stop the taping now and we can plan. Okay?

TD: Okay.

RB: This is Roz Bornstein and I am back with Tillie DeLeon. The date is June 1, 2001 and we are meeting at Tillie's home on Mercer Island, Washington for the "Weaving Women's Words" Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Tillie, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

TD: Yes, you may.

RB: Thank you. I thought—let's see. What we might want to talk about at this point is the volunteer work that you've been doing over the past 10 years—maybe more—maybe longer here on Mercer Island.

TD: Yes, when I stopped working I felt that I had to do something a little more constructive, so I volunteered to do some work at the senior center on Mercer Island. And I also went to the Mercer Island Thrift Shop and decided—

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

TD: —to give them one day a week of my time, just as I give the senior center one day a week.

RB: That's wonderful. Can you tell us what you do for these centers?

TD: At the center I am the receptionist for the health clinic. And I make the appointments and take the payment for the services that are rendered for the seniors, and just spend my time with the people that are coming in and out. And then the next day I go to the Mercer Island Thrift Shop and I work as a volunteer cashier, and I get a big thrill out of all these people coming in and buying—and waiting in line to get in.

RB: Is that right? So it's a popular spot.

TD: Oh, unbelievable. It—and you—by doing this volunteer work I have found a lot of friends—I have made a lot of friends and so that when I even go to the market to do my grocery shopping I run into people that I have been dealing with. And it tends to make the day a little bit more comfortable and a little more interesting than just walking in and buying the things off the shelf and then going home, whereas this way I stop and visit with each one that I know [chuckles] and pass the time of day. And it's good for my selfesteem.

RB: In what way?

TD: It makes me feel—by doing the volunteer work it makes me feel like I'm needed somewhere. And I think that this is important to every woman. She wants to feel that she's important and needed, and I will try and keep it up hopefully [laughs] for many years.

RB: That's great. That's wonderful that you do that. You also are very interested in the Fred Hutchinson Center and City of Hope. Can you describe your interest in those organizations?

TD: Well, the reason for my interest is—it's rather—a little on the selfish side because my first husband died of myelogenous leukemia. And both these organizations, the City of Hope and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research, have been and still are doing research on various types of leukemia. And I feel that they need all the support they can get so they can continue the work that they are in progress.

RB: Wow! That's tremendous that you're doing that.

TD: Well, like I say, it's what I think my first husband would want because that was that—he was that type of a person and I learned so much from him.

RB: I remember when you talked about him. In the earlier part of our interview you mentioned what a generous spirit he had.

TD: Yes. Yes, he was very generous.

RB: And the two of you made such a great team that way and—

TD: Right.

RB: And that spirit lives on.

TD: That's right.

RB: Let's see. Any other final thoughts or feelings about that? That project or any of your volunteer work?

TD: No, the only thing is that I enjoy doing it. It gives me a—like I said, it gives me a feeling of accomplishment; it gives me a feeling of self-esteem and it gives me a feeling of importance.

RB: So there are many rewards to—

TD: There are many rewards. You are rewarded at all times from just seeing the looks on people's faces when they walk out. They're happier for having been there and you feel, well, you can participate in that happiness. You can enjoy that happiness that they are feeling and that's what makes life interesting.

RB: That's lovely. Well, I wonder—it's hard to move on. I mean, these are such wonderful values and such great role modeling for all of us to hear your ideas and thoughts. I wondered though if we could step back a little bit in time again and spend a little bit of time talking about the role and position of Sephardic women during the early years of the community here in Seattle, and to talk about any, you know, specific customs that you remember or how women got along back in those days.

TD: Well, the only thing I can think of is what happened in my own home and my—we had a very loving atmosphere, and so that my mother had the freedom to do things as she wanted to. However, at the time that they first came to this country and for awhile the Sephardic women were secondary to their husbands. The husband was the primary person in the family. And he directed activities and he was the—I'm trying to think of the right word—he was the—what do you call the person that does all the—the original—the only breadwinner. And the women did not work. They didn't have time. They didn't have the cars; they didn't drive. They didn't have the modern equipment that we have in the homes, the various machines. I remember when my mother used to wash by hand and would hang everything on the line to dry. I mean, and this is raising a family and they're so—and then, eventually as time went on, they were able to get the washing machines and they were able to get the other items that would make their work a little bit easier. And they would then have time to do—to spend in organization work. But they—after their husbands would go—would pass on many of them didn't know how to make—how to write a check or how to do any little ordinary bookkeeping. But time takes care of a lot of things, and schooling has a lot to do with it, and eventually the women are no longer secondary citizens.

RB: I know that some of the women in their 90s have mentioned to me that there were some matches—you know, marital matches that took place back then.

TD: It was—in the Old Country the marital matches were made by the two mothers involved, and—

RB: [laughs] Sorry about that.

TD: I'll wait a minute. Okay. Anyhow, I remember my mother telling me that she was living with her aunt at the time and her aunt wanted her to marry a certain individual. Her aunt told my mother that she had met with one of the relatives and that they had arranged a marriage between my mother and the son of this relative. And my mother said, "I don't want to marry him." And since she wasn't her daughter she couldn't force her into it. So she says, "Well, who do you want to marry?" She says, "Well, I saw the person that I want to marry. I saw him walking down the street and that's the one I want to marry." Well, of course, you know, at the Island of Rhodes was a small ghetto—a ghettoized area and so, as it turned out, he was a second cousin. And it seemed like the Sephardics always tried to marry within their own families. They thought that that old saying always went well, "Tell me where you come from and I'll tell you who you are." And this way they knew what family they were going into. So—

RB: Did that tradition continue here in Seattle?

TD: No, I don't think so.

RB: Not in Seattle?

TD: I don't think so. Not so much. It could have been maybe in one or two cases but nothing later on in my time or even a little before. It was really an Old Country tradition rather than a—than being in this country. And although—I know that in our family several of my—well, two of my aunts married first cousins. And I know that that was

prevalent with many families. So—

RB: Was that also in part—large part due to the size of the community [unclear] in Seattle, that it wasn't a large community and that—

TD: I don't think so. I think that they were kind of set in their ways. The original mothers were set in their ways but I don't think that it was because of the size of the community. I think it was because of the attitude more than the number of people involved.

RB: I see, and the attitude being that they needed to know who—

TD: Ya, who the girl was marrying and who she was going—what family she was going into. And—

RB: Did you recall, or do you remember any cases where the woman was not—[unclear] wanted to get married but felt she needed to or—

TD: Yes, I remember one case where they came—they had come from the island of Rhodes— two girls. And when they met their fiancés, which were marriages that were arranged, one of them said, "I'm not marrying him." And she said, "I'd rather go to work." And she did. She went to work.

RB: And was that accepted by the community or what was the response?

TD: Well, the community—the younger element, of course, admired her. The older generation, I don't know how they felt. [laughs] But she put her foot down and she came all the way from the Island of Rhodes and came to this country. She was brought here and so the people that brought her tried to convince her that she should marry him, that he was a fine, upstanding young man. But she said no, that she wouldn't marry him and so she went to work. And she came from the Old Country. [laughs]

RB: What kinds of work did women—

TD: Well, some of them would work in factories. Lots of women would work in factories. Some of the women worked—it may have been afterwards when the girls had gone to school and they had learned the English language—they would be working either as a sales clerk or they would work as office personnel. And just like everyone else—I mean, it was a matter of the times.

RB: Yes.

TD: And education, and when people have an education they can go forward and without it they have to stand back.

RB: Much more limited.

TD: That's right.

RB: There were a number of practices that took place, different customs. And I'm going to name some of them and if you could describe some of them that would be great, or add to them in some way. One of them was the—called mandatha.

TD: That was—

RB: Could you tell us about that?

TD: The mandatha was when a couple became engaged the groom's family—or, rather, parents—the groom's parents would send a tray of sweets and, in some cases, if they could afford it, a gift. They would include a gift, a bracelet, something of gold, something that they could wear around their neck or something that they could wear on their wrist to the bride. And then the bride in turn would send a tray to the groom to be—with sweets and something—and a gift for him. It could be a gift of clothing or a gift of jewelry, whatever they could afford—whatever the family could afford.

RB: Do you know anything about the background of this custom?

TD: No, I don't. I think that it had been carried on for generation after generation and they probably brought it with them from Spain. [unclear] They probably brought that from Spain—just that you see a lot of these things, they must have brought them from Spain.

RB: You're pointing to a beautiful—oh, what would you—how would you describe it?

TD: Well, it's a golden metal—gold embroidered cover—little cover, and it's made of maroon background—maroon silk and it has the design and the embroidery in the gold threads. And time has taken its toll.

RB: Do you know what this was used for?

TD: It's used as a cover or sometimes they'd use it for a—like it would be something that would be used sometimes for—on the back of a chair where the godfather would sit to hold the baby—

RB: Oh.

TD: They would decorate the chair so that it would be with a lot of beauty and gold and—

RB: So for a bris?

TD: For the bris.

RB: I see. Isn't that something? It's just gorgeous. Let's see. Were these types of covers made by the women?

TD: No, I think these were things that they had inherited. And most of them had something— I mean, there wasn't a family that—see, the people that left Spain were the wealthiest ones, and they would take whatever they could carry with them. And many of

them used it as a means of exchange for—they—many of them brought jewelry—beautiful jewelry. I remember seeing some jewelry that was absolutely exquisite and you'd never—it couldn't have been from what they earned or what they worked for in the country that they lived in, because there wasn't that much work for them. There wasn't that much— they had to scrounge around for—to make a livelihood. So—

RB: So this type of fabric was probably passed down many—

TD: For many generations.

RB: Uh-huh. And let's see. Some of the other customs—one that I've heard of is ashuar.

TD: Yes.

RB: After the engagement.

TD: After the engagement. That's the trousseau and the custom was that they would display all the things that the bride was taking with her to her new home, whether it was clothing, whether it was linens, whether it was jewelry, whether it was—whatever items would they display.

RB: Lingerie?

TD: Lingerie and even dresses. They would display whatever they were taking with them, and then they had a group who would come around and assess the value—valuation.

RB: [laughs] I didn't—I've never heard this. Could you describe that?

TD: Well, they would assess the valuation because in case—just in case the marriage was not successful and the husband would leave the bride or—then he would have to compensate the family for the amount that was valued of the trousseau. Well, you might

check with your grandmother about that. Would you do that for me?

RB: Sure.

TD: I'm pretty sure that that's what it was.

RB: So was the trousseau considered part of the dowry then?

TD: Yes, it was part of the dowry.

RB: Okay. All right. Was there another form of dowry that—

TD: Well, depending on the ability of the—of parents as to what they could do. Like—just like in any case even today, I mean, there are some people that can give the bride a wedding that's an extreme amount of money, of cost. And then there are some that can't do that and they do it in the most economical way that they are able to do it, but that's what happens. But—

RB: How did women feel about having their belongings, you know, on the wall?

TD: Well, this was—this was a very important part of their—they felt that it was a very important part of their marriage. Everybody would go through this. Everybody would go through the same thing when they were getting married. They would go through the mandatha, through the ashuar, through the mikvah, through the—now, you mentioned something else but I wasn't aware of that.

RB: Well, I recently heard something called an abramsi. I don't know if I'm pronouncing it correctly.

TD: Well, it sounds like you are but then you might check with the person and—that told you about it and find out what it meant, what it involved.

RB: Yes, I will. I will. So it was just some—these were customs that were so a part of the culture that if one didn't have one that it would be [unclear]. Would—did that happen that women—

TD: Oh, they always had something.

RB: Okay.

TD: The bride's family always managed to get—they would start embroidering when the girls were very little. Many of the girls would do their own embroidering and many of the families would have their sister-in-laws or their friends do some—embroider tablecloths, embroider pillow cases, anything that could be—

RB: Contributed or—

TD: Yes, anything that they could do.

RB: So the women helped each other?

TD: Oh, definitely. Yes, there was a sense of cooperation all the time. In fact, I know that when I was married that my mother sent me my things that she had accumulated during the years. And there were several tablecloths that were hand-embroidered, that one of my aunts, who was very capable at doing this type of work, had made them. So, I mean, there's—

RB: And so, did you do this in Los Angeles? Was it—

TD: Well, no, I didn't because that was a little bit—already past that stage. They didn't do that. After awhile they eliminated that showing, displaying of the dowry, which included the ashuar. And so a lot of things—now, a lot of them still go through the mikvah. The orthodox go through the mikvah but I don't think they go through the displaying of the ashuar.

RB: Very interesting. I wonder what caused that to change [unclear]?

TD: Like anything else, it's a—women's revolution. [laughs] I mean, times have changed and so that women are on a par, so that they don't do things the way that they used to do. And now they do it more in the westernized style of conducting the—even the ceremonies are conducted still—the religious ceremonies are still the same. They never change because there are certain things that they have to have in the wedding ceremony. There's two—there's the—even the young people who married out of their faith will still want the chupah. Even they want the chupah. And they even want the smashing of the glass. Now, what it means, I don't know. But this is something that is sort of a personal thing. Whatever type of ceremony you're having—whatever—

RB: Isn't that something? I had something in my mind and it slipped out of my mind. It's about a few more customs. Oh, I know what it was. It's a beautiful custom and I forget—

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

RB: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein and I'm back with Tillie DeLeon. This is mini-disk number three and the date is still June 1, 2001 and we are finishing Tillie's oral history for the "Weaving Women's Words" Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Tillie, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

TD: Yes, you have.

RB: Thank you. We were talking about a custom where people—women would serve on a tray a bowl of preserves or different sweets with a glass of spoons?

TD: With a container of spoons. Well, this is interesting because the custom was that we have different forms—the Sephardics have different forms of sweets that they always made. Some of them were preserves and some of them were what they called charope,

which was sugar that had been cooked and it becomes bleached and—

RB: Is this with egg whites?

TD: And—no the egg whites is for a—something that they bake.

RB: Oh.

TD: They put together with—but in any case, it's one of these delicacies that is Sephardic. And so they put it on a—in a little—in a bowl, a serving bowl. And then they have a cuchariera, which is a round bowl, highly decorative silver bowl that has the spaces for the spoons and the forks to be placed therein. And then when someone would come to visit they would take out a tray of the preserves or the charope, and then they would—and they would put in the silverware and the glasses of water and serve to the people that were visiting them. And each one would take a spoonful of the preserve and then a glass of water and the next person would be the next one served. And that was custom. And also, they would sometimes serve some things that they would bake with the egg whites and almonds. They would grind almonds—the blanched almonds—add sugar, and then get—make it into little balls and then bake them, and those would be called maruchinos. And then they had many different delicacies, which would be hard to—it would be difficult for me to tell you unless I got the cookbook out. [laughs]

RB: Now, I heard something about blessings that went along with this serving.

TD: Well, this serving is—was for—the occasions for it was if someone came to visit. That was number one, or if someone had—was having a—an engagement party, a celebration of an engagement. And each one would take a serving of the sweets and they would express a blessing, if it happened to be a bride or a groom or a someone that had a—just had a baby or someone they—they were having visitors for—that someone had a baby.

RB: So upon taking the sweet they would say the blessing first?

TD: They would say it first and then eat the—

RB: Preserve or—

TD: The sweets.

RB: The sweets.

TD: And then put the spoon—oh, and take a little water and then put the spoon in the glass so that the next person would take the next glass [chuckles] and so on. It would go—

RB: And who would serve the tray to the group?

TD: Usually they wanted—like, if they had an older daughter—if they had a daughter that was old enough to carry the tray, then they would have them carry the tray and go around. And that's about it.

RB: That's wonderful. Let's see. Any other customs or traditions or stories that you remember about these that—[chuckles] do you remember, were you a part of this as a young girl? Do you remember the—

TD: Well, I remember seeing my mother having company and at one point in time one of our schoolteachers came over to visit. And my mother immediately took out the tray, the silver tray and the bowl of charope or preserve, and the glasses of water and the container for the—and the container for the forks and spoons, and served to the teacher. And the teacher said—she took the bowl in her hand, thinking that the whole bowl was for her. And she ate three or four spoonfuls and then she said, "Do you mind very much if I don't eat the whole thing? I think it's a little too much for me." [laughter] And so my mother said, "It's all right. It's all right."

RB: Isn't that something? She didn't embarrass the teacher?

TD: No.

RB: Isn't that—with all of these different customs, I had heard that women would get together and sing. Is that—

TD: Well, there were many—see, they brought back with them a lot of songs, a lot of ballads, a lot of romanzas, they called them. And in this article of my—

RB: Please go ahead and describe it. That'd be great.

TD: Oh, really?

RB: You mentioned it in the first part of our interview.

TD: Well, there was a young Spanish scholar who went to the Island of Rhodes in 1933 and he was doing research on the songs and ballads and romanzas of the Spanish Jews that had been exiled and were now living on the Island of Rhodes. They also went to Monastir, which was close to Turkey, and that was another city that they went to. And they asked around. They wanted a Sephardic lady who could sing these songs, and so they approached—so they recommended that they go to my grandmother, Mazeltov Yaakov Israel—De Yaakov Israel. That was the way that they identified themselves was they included their husbands. Her name was Mazeltov of Jacob Israel. They—De Yaakov Israel.

RB: Oh.

TD: And then when he returned to Spain he did a—he wrote a book on all the songs that he had compiled from my grandmother. And he later became a celebrated literary critic in Spain. And after the war—his name was Guarmo Diaz Pla, and after the war—World War II, when all the Jews had been rounded up and—on the Island of

Rhodes and sent to concentration camps, he went to the Island of Rhodes looking for Mazeltov De Yaakov Israel. And at the time he spoke to someone who did not know that my grandmother had been brought to America by her daughter. Do you want me to mention her name?

RB: Mm-hmm.

TD: Mrs. Rosa Alhadeff. And she had sent her son, Ike, to go and pick up my grandmother from Ellis Island and bring her to Seattle—accompany her to Seattle. And she sang these songs for the—she had given this gentleman the songs that she knew and that were well recognized on the island. And she was highly recognized. And he wrote of her as a woman—"a grand dame of Castille." And so then when he came back and someone told him that she had been rounded up. She had been in the roundup of the various Jews that were taken to the concentration camp. He wrote a song in her memory and he wrote—he started out with one of the songs that she had sung to him. And then after he—after he spoke a few words about that song, and he knew what the song was because it was actually engraved in his memory—he said that he would—he wrote this song. And he said that, "Now I have come back inquiring Mazeltov De Yaakov Israel and the Jewry is deserted, bitterness where once was honey. From the north barbarians came. Mazeltov De Yaakov Israel, the crematory of Germany all the people have destroyed." And he never did find out that my grandmother was alive. But he wrote this song in her memory and he added it to his original book. And he said—and this is a translation, "My only [unclear] and my remembering and even fall in the Jewry of Rhodes, 1933. The songs are stilled. Mazeltov De Yaakov Israel. Black my memory has become from tears and gall, but thy memory I keep, Mazeltov De Yaakov Israel."

RB: Isn't that beautiful?

TD: He was a brilliant man. He became a very brilliant part of the literary critics of Spain.

RB: Would it be possible to get a copy of that poem for—

TD: I can make you a copy of one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—I can make you a copy and mail it to you.

RB: That would be great. I would love it. I would really appreciate it. So your grandmother would sing the songs and those around her would learn them. Other women.

TD: Yes, other women would sing them.

RB: Uh-huh, and what would—when would the women sing songs and for what—

TD: For all occasions. They had songs of happiness and they had songs of sadness. When someone passed away they would go and sing the songs of sadness. And when there was a wedding it was happiness and it was—and then this particular ballad that he writes about, which is the three doves go flying around the palace of the king. And the princess is there, but a Moor comes in. One of the Moors comes in and he's dark. And he wants the princess and the father said, "You can't have her. So he kills the father. No, he makes a—he tells the father—he wouldn't sell her for gold or for any favors. So he said, "Well, then, we will have to come—go into combat." And so they took out swords, and he didn't kill the father but he made—he lost to the Moor because he was a young man, and he lost to the Moor. And so he made him a gardener. And then he took the mother and made her a cook in his home, and then she had three brothers and he killed the three brothers. And she was crying one day and she said, "Tell me." So he said to her, "Why are you crying, my love?" And she said, "I am crying—I am crying not because of my loss of my three brothers, not because my mother is a cook, not because my father is the gardener, but that I am—that I will have to be married to you and I feel that I just can't go on." And so she said, "Let me have your sword," and he, being a gentleman in a sense—he handed her the sword with the handle towards her. And she grabbed

the handle and killed him. And he said at that—and she said at that moment, “Now, I have my father back and my mother back and my brothers three.” And this was in the song.

RB: Wow!

TD: [chuckles] This is the ballad that my grandmother sang to—this—to him and he was so impressed with her. It’s unbelievable; it really is. But anyhow, this was printed in this “American Sephardi Magazine,” which is a journal from the Yeshiva University. So I’ll make you a copy of it.

RB: Thank you so much.

TD: And I’ll mail it to you, only I want to get your address.

RB: Of course. Thank you so much. Well, why don’t we—we can do that maybe once the taping is over.

TD: Oh, okay.

RB: But why don’t you—let’s see. It’s hard to know how to wrap up this marvelous interview, Tillie, and I wondered what thoughts or reflections you have—you know, what you would like to say as we end this interview.

TD: Well, I’m very pleased to have been a part of this program.

RB: How so?

TD: I feel highly flattered that I was invited to participate and I hope that I brought a little background knowledge to the program.

RB: A lot. You brought a lot.

TD: And I enjoyed working with you.

RB: Thank you.

TD: You've been delightful.

RB: Thank you so much. Well, listen, thanks so much for your time.

TD: You're welcome, honey.

RB: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]