

Interviewed: Vivian Rakoff
Oral History Clip Title: Braiding Challah with My Mother
Theme: Jewish Life in South Africa
Interviewer: Naomi Raichyk
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(Vivian)

We were Jewish and observant, but we were not Orthodox. The family kept kosher. We celebrated seders. Even in the countryside, before we moved to the city when I was six, my mother braided challah every Friday. The *mishulach*. Do you know what a *mishulach* is? A guy who's sent to collect funds would come to Port Nolloth. Port Nolloth was three hundred miles from the railhead. There were a half-dozen Jewish families. And there would come this elderly Jewish guy to collect money for the yeshiva, for Zionism. We had a blue box behind the door and his little yellow-and-black blue box. His name was Mr. Mazen. I can remember sitting with Mr. Mazen on the stoop when I must have been at most five and him drawing the Hebrew alphabet for me on a piece of paper as we sat on the bench on the stoop. When my parents did visit Palestine in 1935, they went to see Mr. Mazen in his yeshiva. They went to Jerusalem and they found him. He was in a little apartment and they said, "Mr. Mazen," in Yiddish, "who is in your yeshiva?" And he said, "*Ikh bin der yeshivah* [I am the yeshiva]." And the Zionist collectors for money would appear regularly. And there was another Jewish contact: the commercial travellers. Almost all the men would sell goods. You know what I mean by a commercial traveller? Because they've disappeared in America and I'm never sure.

(Interviewer)

Perhaps you can just say what a commercial traveller is.

(Vivian)

Well, a commercial traveller is a guy, like *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman is a commercial traveller. You take your parcel of goods and you go to the countryside with stores and you [sic] and they give you orders and you go back to the city and the orders are dispatched. And they operated on commission. And they were almost all Jews. So they came. They exchanged news. And they were treated as honoured guests. And that was a very strong Jewish contact.