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Interview with Mr. Robert Chaiken, Russian immigrant, July 10, 1969, by Myron L. Lazarus.

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Program of the University of Delaware . . . .

A O.K. . . . is that the first question, when I was born?

Q No, no, I'll get to it. We're interviewing Mr. Robert Chaiken and the interviewer is Myron Lazarus. O.K. So when were you born?

A 1894. October the 4th, 1894.

Q Um hmm. You must . . . were you in a small family, by the way?

A No.

Q A large family?

A We were a family . . . well, in two parts. My father has two wives. My mother . . . my personal mother died at my birth, but I was the fifth child. After he remarried and had four more children with the other wife.

Q The reason I ask that is that there's so many people, older people, from large families that some of them don't know when they were born, and you were quite definite about when you were born.

A Yeah, I'm definite because I have a reason for it. You see, my older sister, when the Chinese and Russian war broke out . . . .

Q The Japanese and Russian . . . .

A Japanese, I meant . . . the Japanese and Russian war in 1905 . . . at that time I was a child of about eight, nine years old. My older sister immigrated to the United States with one of her second cousins that got married in Russia to a man by the name Sam Horowitz and he was a soldier at that time in Russian army. And he didn't want to go to war, he ran away from the army, see, so . . . and by trade he was a barber. After being six months in . . . and he married my second cousin. After being six months in the United States, he sent a ticket, a ship card, at that time they called 'em a ship card, sent a ticket, a ship ticket, for his wife to come. So being my older sister has been under the leading circumstances of a stepmother, which it wasn't in those days very sweet to live under, so she was the first one to immigrate with my second cousin to the United States. Well, it didn't take very long while she was in here, maybe for the six months or some certain ailment or sickness that she contracted in the United States, and being they were very poor, that Sam Horowitz and the wife, they were very poor, and they were unable to give her maybe better assistance in medicare or medicines or hospitals or pay for doctors, some way or another she passed away. She passed away

we don't know how, exactly--I don't know how, tried, tried to find out, I don't know how, but she . . . whenever I tried for them to explain me what happened, the explanation was some kind of a tumor was in her from child on that nobody took care of and nobody could help her in those days.

Q Now, what is the town you were born in, now?

A The town is Mogilev [sounds like Nadneprea"], that means on the Dnepr, the town is on the Dnepr. And it's a capital city, government . . . Mogilev is a capital city of several other states, like Minsk and [sounds like "Dvinsk"] and other number of towns that probably I can't exactly remember like Kiev . . . and that was the capital city of Kiev, Orsha, Orshaslav, Bierhev [sp] and so on.

Q What size town was this?

A The size town I would say would be half of the size, maybe a quarter a size of the town of Wilmington. In Wilmington let's say is 150,000, let's say there was between 50,000 to 60,000 maybe 70,000 . . . exactly the population I don't know.

Q A good-sized city.

A But it was a good-sized city and it was fairly progressive [sounds like "intelligancey"] city, see. People down there was taught more of education, taught more of school. They have several universities, several gymnasiums, you know, they call them gymnasiums, you know, universities and plain ordinary schools like in here, you know, they have public schools.

Q What business was your father in?

A My father when he was . . . first when I became to know he was in the yard goods business, a [inaudible] manufacture . . .

Q Retail?

A Retail. Retail yard goods, in Russian that's called manufacture. Bill Lazarus was in that, too.

Q But he didn't make them, he just . . .

A He didn't make them, he just retailed, sold, like retail. Principally he . . . principally he himself as far as I can understand of hearing--you know parents of those days don't sit down with you and explain you what they work and what they doing, see, they keep very shy away from you. You have to make your own way. Principally as I understand he was learned in Hebrew as a [inaudible - Yiddish?]-you know what that means.

Q Yes.

A And then he married, it was supposed to be that his in-laws had set him up, his in-laws had set him up in a yard goods store. So with the

the first wife, then he had with my mother, they kept on, I suppose, I don't know how the circumstances were but they were never in a real poor circumstances or begging. We lived in a fairly decent home . . . we as far as I know always had a fairly decent home.

Q You lived right in the city.

A In the city, and in the city at that time, we owned a cow . . . yeah, we owned a cow and we raised in the yard we raised a few chickens, you know, and it was still all in the city. That was the first business that he was in. Then he bankrupt in this business when he got the second wife. The second wife was a highly educated person. She was educated in pharmacy, and she was a very good looking woman. And he started off in the bottling business, soda water [inaudible] business. And I was already at that time between eight and nine or ten years old when he started that. But that wasn't enough, with four kids of ours and four of his, to make a living with, and being she was highly educated that way, some way or another she bought a . . . [inaudible] . . . they bought a drugstore. And at that time there was two kinds of drugstores in Russia. One was a government, they were called the apoteca [sp], see, that's in English, apoteque, in Russian it's called apoteca. Another one was an apsicorski magazine [sp], it means like Eckerd's has, see. You carry everything, from soup to nuts, and you also make prescriptions, but in order to make prescriptions, you had to be a registered pharmacist. But she exactly wasn't registered pharmacist, but she knew how to make prescriptions and read prescriptions from doctors. So we made prescriptions on the side, not by law, and if the law would catch us, we'd have to pay a fine or go to jail. But, oh my God, the corruption was very big and you'd pay off and you made prescriptions. So naturally when she had already the three kids, you know, or four kids, so we hired a pharmacist that also worked under . . . a graduated pharmacist, but he himself wasn't a graduated pharmacist, but he also knew how to make medicine and read medicine and all, made it and everything, so he was the one that helped in the drugstore to make medicine. As I was coming up, naturally I had to go to Hadda [sp] and I had to do this . . . well, I was a kid, most of the time I went to Hadda. Then I had to go to read Russian . . .

Q About how old were you when you went to Hadda?

A Well, I was . . . five, five and a half, six years . . . at that time, five years old, they have to go to Hadda.

Q Sure. Or younger.

A Huh?

Q Or younger sometimes.

A Well, you can't go younger . . . how much younger can you be? Really, you see, they're not so much developed in these days, three or four years old, as they are the kids in this country. Your parents don't give you the development and that. They don't sit down and explain you things when you were little or take you in their arms and love you

up and tell you . . . read you comic books and stuff like that. Your mind is not very much developed like it is today in this country or even later on in the other country maybe after it started different. But in my time, being I was younger child from the first wife and he had a pretty second wife, I didn't count. Children at that time didn't count no how, see. They had no value at all.

Q Did you go to the gymnasium?

A No, I didn't reach that. I even didn't reach very much public school. I had a couple of grades of public school in Russian. I didn't even finish there. But during this time, during the time of ten and thirteen, that I was between 10 and 13, my older brother. . . my older brother was 21. After my sister left for United States, my brother in the same year was 21 and he had to go to the army. And he was a big strapping six-footer, maybe taller and he weighed maybe about 200 pounds, he was a powerful boy, but in our family . . . he was a . . . he learned the trade of making epaulets, you know, in gold . . .

Q Sewing?

A Sewing. And he didn't know nothing about . . . anything about the army or anything, but they took him, and being he was strong, there were sections where the government, the Czar, has to send 'em, you know. There were certain go to infantry around the part of the . . . part of the country, the White Russia or some other part in Russia and some of them go to Siberia. They're called the [sounds like "Guardia"], the strongest ones. And they told us, when they go off to Siberia for cavalry . . . on horses and all this kind . . . cavalry, see. And he was sent to Siberia, Yerkutsk [sp], for cavalry. Naturally he never saw a horse in his life. Well, he saw horses, naturally, I don't say a horse in his life, but he personally had not mingled [inaudible], see. And he never had any kind of a physical . . . physical . . . what do you call . . . what would I say, the physical . . .

Q Life? I mean he wasn't sportsman . . .

A Did not physical sportsman, like had to take a nap on account of [inaudible] or anything . . . so he was an ordinary person, but he was strong. He wasn't a fighter, he wasn't a boxer, he wasn't nothing such a thing as that, making epaulets. So they sent him down to Yerkutsk in the Guardia, 'cause they're the strongest army, that was the strongest army, the Guardia.

Q Because of his size, probably.

A Huh?

Q Because of his size, probably.

A Because of his size, naturally, all of them were his size. And he was sent down there with another Jewish boy from our same town. His father was a teamster that used to haul little freight by horse and

wagon from . . . let's say from the station to the stores. Merchandise would come in by the rail, he would be at the rail station with a horse and wagon and he would load his stuff and he'd bring in to some of the stores where they was supposed to be distributed. He was also a strong boy like my brother and both of them were sent. But he already knew something about horses, more a little . . . he made more acrobatic, he was more physically trained, if you know what I mean, and he fitted in into that. But my brother never fitted in into the horse so he was in the army for about three months and naturally they sent him out to do some kind of an exercise with the horses, and the horse threwed him and he got killed.

Q Oh, my.

A He got killed and the Czar's army has never let the family know of his whereabouts or how he disappeared or anything. [Inaudible] . . .

Q That's it.

A So this here boy has written to his father to tell my father that my brother, that his son was killed by a horse. Well, at that time, say [inaudible] . . . we pray the funeral in the house and all that and he disappeared. My other sister that came to the United States, she was 21 and she was also . . . died by a mysterious circumstance [inaudible] . . . before. Well, this here brother of mine died in the army, maybe I was 10 or 11 years old. Though my sister died in the United States, at that time, my mind was made up not to go to the army, no matter at any cost, and go to the United States. At the same time, another young fellow that was in the United States from a richer family, he was from a richer family, . . . when I was 12 years old, you see, a young fellow from a richer family in our town, also a Jewish boy, they had already a building of their own, like at an apartment house, maybe two, three stories high and maybe they have eight, ten apartments. And he didn't need United States because he didn't have to work and he didn't put his mind up . . . at that time in 1907 and '8 and '9, United States wasn't easy to . . . for any Jewish boy to come in and start working, get himself a livelihood. So he kind of didn't like it, so the mother sent him money enough to come back home. And when he came back home, naturally what he knew of the life of the United States, and what kind of a type of man or young fellow that United States would need to prosper. And he was also like a neighbor, you understand, and I used to generally talk and he used to say, "Look,"--at that time my name was Racmiel [sp]--here I'm Bob, see, so . . .

B [Unidentified woman] Robert.

A Robert . . . well, he knows what I mean. And he tells me, "Racmiel, you make up, you go to the United States. That's the kind of boy is like you are," wirey, strong, you know, run around [inaudible] . . . And I had to help . . . I had to help my father already to make a living when I was 10 years old. So I had to work in the soda water factory and at that time, everything was nothing automation, you know, everything was by hand. You had to wash the bottles, you had to wash them in a tub by hand,

And if you have to put gas in the bottles to make the . . . mix the soda water to . . . water with the gas, you have to make the gas not automation way but by hand. So that was a big tank in the back of the apartment, there was a wheel with some kind of leather around it, and you have to strain with all your will in order to bring up gas into the tank. So when the tank filled up with gas, then you filled . . . you had another mixer that you put your bottles under . . . they started some kind of machinery to do it with, very crude looking machinery but it was something that they started to work it with . . . and seltzer water and sweet-like stuff the bottles fill . . . of course at that time different names . . . here is Coca-Cola, there was something different. The bottles were bigger than this. Every bottle contained no less than three glasses of eight-ounce glasses, was a bottle of soda, see. And that was sold maybe for two cents or three cents or five cents. No, five cents, never have that, but three cents or two cents. And I had to help to do this then . . . and I was a sharp little boy, 10, 12, 11 years old, I had to go out and sell the stuff. And I had to take the stuff and it was 24 bottles to each case. I had to fill the cases with the bottles, lift them from the floor and lift them in the top of the wagon, and the wagon was higher than I am, and I had to settle the . . . putting the horse in place, you know, and I used to have to go out to sell this stuff. And that wasn't good at that time either because everytime you go around, you know, the Christian boys wouldn't leave you alone. As long as you're a Jewish boy, they wouldn't like it. They just hated the same as they hate you in here, and worse. So while you were gone they would run after the wagon, they would steal some bottles out of there and run away with . . . it wasn't easy. No, during the day I used to come naturally, my mother . . . whatever it was, rain, snow, hail, I used to go with a wagon to sell the stuff. And I had to . . . meantime I had to educate myself a little bit, too. And you came home, no matter how wet you was or how anything, whether you had anything to eat, your father wouldn't come over and say, "Well, my son, did you eat anything? You wanta dry yourself out with that?" Say nothing. My brothers, whatever money was in their pocket, they laid it down on the table, the father counted it out and that's all. You're home. I had to take the [inaudible] out to the horses . . . I don't know how to explain you the horses, I put it in the shaft, I had to put 'em in a shaft and fix it up so he can get in the wagon, I have to put the horse back again in the stable, you know, take him out and feed him, put the hay for him and put the oats for him and do this for him and everything else. All I had to do when I was 10 or 11 years old. Then after this, when the drugstore came up, so naturally I liked it better. I liked it in the store better. So I used to run to the store and I was in everywhere. The store started off with a little bit of nothing, hardly, so . . .

Q This was the drugstore, now.

A At the drugstore, yes, it started out with some little things of a very little bit, a little bit of perfume, a little bit of this, a little bit of the other, some little drugstore, some patent medicines, you know what

I mean? But everytime a customer would come in and ask for something new, they didn't have. I was the one that have to go to the wholesale place to pick that item up to bring it again. The wholesale place from the store maybe two, three miles. Well, a young kid I was, what was three miles to me to go? I ran. I ran and bring the stuff and that's the way the things was of. That time . . . after a while the store started to progress little by little, so I used to go to the wholesale place and carry a bigger, heavier basket to the store . . . they sell more merchandise, so bigger baskets from the wholesale place to the store. And [inaudible] . . . what things weren't working right for me because I was under the [inaudible] of a stepmother. My father only knew that I should go . . . after I got [inaudible] I should go to shul and [inaudible] and other questions he didn't ask how I get along, he never asked, so I . . . around 12, 13 years old, I start to figure out that things was not right for me, 13 . . . so I said to my father, I says, "Well . . .

Q Were you bar mitzvah at 13?

A Huh?

Q Were you bar mitzvah at 13?

A Yeah. I was bar mitzvah at 13. You know what counted bar mitzvah was at that time? A father took you over to the shul and he showed you how to lay the [inaudible] and he gave me the [inaudible] to make the brokhas [sp] and that's it. I don't know, they didn't make no more [sounds like "lehaim"] or nothing at that time. Today they spend \$25,000. This was bar mitzvah. And like they say, well, this is your own, everytime you make a . . . what was it at the time . . . a nivre [sp], you make something that is not right, it's on your head. You're a man now. O.K.

Q You talked about when you were driving around with the horse and cart with the sodas that you received, you know, some discrimination from the Gentiles. Do you know of any other . . . do you remember any other discrimination against Jews that you experienced?

A You bet there is.

Q Well, tell us about it.

A The discrimination of the Jews that they hated them. But that was some . . . some peasants . . . there was some peasants and some I don't know what you would call 'em, more a little bit intelligent, but they were [inaudible] . . . but they hated them but they still lived in peace together in that time. We didn't have no pogroms, we didn't have anything until . . . we didn't have really a real pogrom we didn't have until the Japanese and Russian war was on and that lasted for quite a number of . . . couple of years, two or three years, and the . . . what do you call that, the . . . the soldiers, the . . .

Q Cossacks?



A The ones that had to be . . . the enlisted men . . . the ones that had to be enlisted in the army . . .

Q Draftees?

A The draftees used to go by . . . in hoardes, in big hoardes, you know, hoardes maybe from different small towns, they used to gather them up all at one time . . . little country towns, 25 out of here and 25 . . . and they'd gather them all in one troop and they used to go by foot through our town, see. 'Cause this is the capital town, I told you, this is where they had to come to get their enlisted . . . enlistments and get appointed where they're supposed to go and ship to. So at that time they were pretty rough. But they didn't make any killings or anything . . . oh, they used to come to the marketplaces . . .

Q Just raised Cain.

A . . . where they had stands and sold bread and they sold fish and they sold fruit, but they were all on stands, there wasn't any store. They used to upset 'em and kick 'em over and grab 'em and you know, they'd steal 'em and eat 'em and threw the women over, you know . . . those women that was selling . . . they throw the men around . . . this is the kind of an atmosphere it was down there. But really, real pogroms we didn't have. We didn't have that.

Q Pretty much peasants, weren't they, in the army.

A Mostly peasants that came through.

Q Right.

A Very peasants . . . all peasants.

Q How about your father's business, did he have any problem with the authorities, or being a Jew . . .

A What?

Q Your father's business, you know, the soda business and . . .

A Yes, the problems were that they didn't make enough money and didn't make enough living, this was the problem, see. And then he . . . little by little he had to ease out of . . . he had to keep on, but he had to ease out and help his wife in the store a little bit, too, you know.

Q He stayed in this country, though.

A He stayed in the . . . all of them left the country . . . I was the only one that came over. After I was 13 or 14 years old, I didn't want to stay with my father and mother anymore. I told him, "Well, I have to make myself something, because I made up my mind." I told my father that I'd made up my mind to go to the United States. And by some way I told him, "by hook or by crook, or by stealing myself a way, or whichever way it will be, I will not be home, I'll run away. I'm not

gonna be in the army." But if I'm gonna be in the United States here . . . at that time, if you're not in the army by 21, see, and . . .

Q In Russia.

A In Russia, and if you didn't show yourself up, your father was obligated to pay 300 rubles for your fine . . . he had to pay fine or 300 rubles, 300 rubles in those days, you know what it meant, a lot of money. So at that time I told him, "If I be in the United States, I'm gonna send you the 300 rubles, and if I cannot send you, I'm gonna promise you maybe I'll come and stay to the [inaudible]," that means stay to the army if you can't come in for the army.

Q You mean you'd come back.

A I'd come back from the United States to stay. That was in 1900 . . . that was in 19 and . . . when I left it was 12, see. However, he didn't agree to it because I don't know for any . . . some certain reason he didn't agree for me to go to United States because his older daughter died down there or not, I don't know if this was the reason why, but he didn't agree right away. And I as a youngster, I still had the right up to 17 to go to the United States on a government pass, with the stipulation that I'm coming back to stand, call that stand [sounds like "prisa"], to stand . . . come back to stand for the army. That was the stipulation, and if not, naturally, they got record that I left and I have to pay a fine. So I . . .

Q But you had this kind of a pass, huh?

A I had . . .

Q This was a passport.

A A passport. I told my father I'd like to go on a passport. He didn't want to do it. But in order to get a government passport to go, you had to have first a constable like what it is from a constable, a passport from the state where my father was born. My father wasn't born in Mogilev. He was born in another state near Mogilev around [sounds like "Podibranka"], a small little town or maybe five or six hundred people. And he didn't want to give me that passport in order to be able to get the government passport, see. Or otherwise I can't get no government passport. At that time I was already getting on 15, you know, and I was working for somebody else. I working in the timber woods, as a clerk. And they used to ship the [inaudible] by water, see, so first I was in the woods when they chopped it down, I used to measure every timber log. They used to take off all the branches and I used to measure the log and they would just roll them down to the water and tie 'em together and ship 'em, see. But I was there during the wintertime I was in the woods there as a clerk to take every man, how many timber he cut down and [inaudible] . . . . For this I received 50 rubles for six months and board, and board and a place where you can live, a place with nothing but a camp tent, you know, like . . . made out of some kind of a clay, you know . . .

Q Where was this, now?

A That was in Russia.

Q Yeah, but how far from your original home town?

A Well, that was about 75 miles from my home town, several miles, because I . . .

Q You did this mainly to leave your family.

A Yeah. That was in the place . . . around the place where [inaudible] Tolstoi, Tolstoi that written the book you know, that's around his Imania [sp], it was around his place where I was in the timber . . . that was government timber that we cut down. And he had his own timberland down there that Tolstoi, very big timberland, and he also had very fine horses, you know, stables of horses, and he had only one daughter, she was the best horse rider there is. And he made a riding academy for her right around his . . . right around his palace. You know, when I was cutting the timber, on Sundays I used to go down there by horse and wagon, I borrow sled. I used to go down there to that Imania to look what it looks like. So that's how I know about [sounds like "Graf"] Tolstoi's Imania, that's Graf Tolstoi's palace. And then she was killed by a horse, too. She had . . . they had the biggest and the finest horses in the land. But he was a very liberal man to the peasants, the peasants liked him, and he used to help them a little bit more than the Czar, you know, and everything else. He was a very good man.

Q You did this also . . . you had in mind, by the way, getting enough money to . . .

A That's what I had in mind. I hired myself out . . . I had in mind to save that money in order to get myself a ticket to go. But in the year . . . at the age of 16, I didn't have no work where to go to get it. That wasn't steady work either. And I was brooding and naturally things were very bad for me around the house, and I refused to . . . I refused to do everything that I'd done before . . . how do you call it in here, I rebelled. And the only thing came to clashes that day with my father, I said, "You have to send me to the United States. I want to go to America." And I was 16 going on 17. At that time the other three brothers had been growing up . . . one was maybe five, one was eight, one was ten, and they'd been given more education than I had because they didn't work to do . . . they didn't help to do the work that I had done. They went to school. That was their business . . . their business, they went to school. You think when I was going to school, I used to cry my eyes out for my father to give me to kopekas to buy a tablet to write with, or a pen. That's how hard it came for me to learn something, but I did. And naturally I didn't learn good enough. I don't know. I was not educated enough . . .

Q Well, did he finally give you . . .

A That was my very sad [inaudible] even right now in this world. I know my shortcomings, you know, but this is the way I'll have to live. However, he finally decided to give me a passport and whatever little packing up of my stuff I took along with me, naturally my [inaudible], that was the first thing and . . . and I went . . . and they send me off.

Q Did they give you money?

A Money they didn't give me for spending money. I had to have 25 rubles to come to Ellis Island to show because I didn't have nobody to say anything to stand for me. But he told me plain, "When you get to America, immediately you return these 25 rubles." And I told him, "Yes, Father, I'll return them. I give you my word." I was went through the route of Libada [sp]. From Mogilev . . .

Q Now, you had a regular passport for this.

A A regular, government passport.

Q Yeah. And that's the passport that said that you would return.

A Huh?

Q That's the passport that said . . .

A No. The passport remained with me.

Q I see . . . no, no, that you promised to return for your service.

A I return the money, not the passport.

Q No, no, but you mentioned before that you had a passport that said that when you became of age to be drafted, you would return.

A I would return to go to the army.

Q Yes.

A With the passport . . . but I didn't return.

Q Right . . . right. But this was the passport you were talking about.

A That's the passport I was talking about. I . . . what did I skip here?

Q Now, what was your route, by the way, from Russia?

A I've got it right here. From Mogilev they bought me a ticket, a railroad ticket to Libada [sp] . . . that's Germany, Libada. From Libada I had to go on a ship to London or Hull . . . first it stopped at Hull, then it stopped at Liverpool. The boat was nothing but a cattle boat, a small cattle boat, too. That's what it was.

Q Now this was the boat from Liverpool.

A No, that's the boat from Libada. That's from Germana. The boat from Libada to Liverpool was a cattle boat . . . hard benches, dirt, bad odor. But youngsters, all of us was youngsters, some of them middle-aged fellows. And it took us from Libada to Liverpool seven days to get there. The water was so rough that many days you were standing ready to drown. The water would float right over the barge, whatever that was, or boat, whatever you call it. Nobody could eat anything and they [inaudible] . . . fed only with boiled potatoes in the skin with herring. That was the food that you got. You think it's easy to remember those things, but you can remember, and it's really a pity. So this is the kind of food, and whoever survived--some of them didn't survive--whoever survived came to Liverpool. They couldn't stay on their feet, none of us . . . by holding onto rafts, by holding onto the boat not to fall over . . . they were [inaudible] . . . I couldn't stay on my feet. A young boy, I can't stay on my feet, I wobble here, wobble there. But it was . . .

Q You mean after you landed in Liverpool.

A After I landed in Liverpool, getting off the boat, getting off the boat already. There was a committee, a Jewish committee, in Liverpool that always looked for those kind of a immigrants. Naturally I had a ticket I have to go to the United States with . . . my passport shows. And they took us in, maybe five or eight at a time in certain homes and they give us a bed to sleep in and they give us some water to wash up and they give us a meal. Naturally it was Friday night, we had to go to shul, so they went to shul to pray . . . Saturday we went to shul. So we only stayed one night in Liverpool, then they took us in the train to London. In London, during the train that was about six, seven hours to ride by train at that time from Liverpool to London. So at certain stations some way or another somebody'd serve sandwiches down there of some kind, bread and butter, tea or somethin' like that. So this was the eat that we had for six or eight hours to come to London. In London, naturally I had my passport so there was no committee there, but the passport said where we had to stay in certain places, and so--I don't know whether it was a hotel or not--but however we stayed in big rooms and several of us together stayed in London for about two, three days. And naturally we used to go to shul and used to go look around in London to the markets. We used to go and we seen the trolley cars two and three stories high at that time, you know, two, three stories high, people packed and lots of people running on top of the aisle, you know, and stores was a lot of them . . . this is what I remember there . . . there was a lot of people there. You couldn't get through the crowd, hardly. From there, from London, they give me my route to go to the United States, but I had to go from London to Glasgow. And in Glasgow I had to go in on that big ship to go to the United States. In Glasgow, when I reached Glasgow--it also took about six, eight hours to go from London to Glasgow by train . . . that was a beautiful boat . . . boat, that I looked at it, I really couldn't see the top of it. Big, big, tall, beautiful new boat. And I'll never forget the name . . . the name of the boat was Caledonia. Naturally we had to go by third and fourth class, whatever class we had to go, way down in the bottom, see. But every spot was so beautifully clean . . . everything shined, the brass shined on every door. Every . . . what do you call that . . . compart-

ment that they give you, they give two, three fellows . . . two boys or three boys a compartment with two, three beds, you know, right over top of you. But so nice and clean, that I . . . really I looked at . . . that was all open my eyes . . . so I had another two or three Jewish boys, one of them was from another town, one of them was a teacher, he was very more educated in Hebrew. Another one also was in the ship. So we kept stuck together for a while, and the meantime, while I was on that big boat, I happened to get acquainted with a fellow that was in the United States for a couple of years and spoke English already and he went to Russia to see his parents and return. He was already returning to go back again to the United States. Some way or another I got in together with this here fellow and he liked me and I stuck to him. I stuck to him and he started to show me . . . show me how . . . money, like American money. He says, "First of all, you'll have to know," he says. "This is a nickel . . ." And he had some, he had American money. "This is a penny," he had two or three pennies, nickel, dimes, and a quarter. That's as far as he went. And by the time I said quarter, I broke my teeth. And everybody on this here boat was English, you know . . . I mean not [inaudible] . . . it was . . . they were not Irish either, they were Scot . . . Scotland. But they was talking English, you know, and he learned me a few words in English, how to say, "Pardon me," and I kept on through the boat hollering "Pardon me" no matter it was the place or not the place. And he showed me how this is a button and this is a buttonhole, and I learned those few words while I was there, and naturally I knew the money already, a nickel, a dime and a quarter I kept on drumming in my head. And the boys that were with me, three or four fellows, we all parted in New York. We said goodbye to one another . . . two of them was German, stayed in New York, friends took 'em . . . I didn't have nobody to receive me at the Ellis Island, I had my 25 rubles to show. Of course they give you vaccinations and they look over everything, you know, and all that . . . and they put another ticket on you at Ellis Island and ship you by train first to Philadelphia . . . first to New York train, from the Ellis Island to New York train . . .

Q Ellis Island.

A Ellis Island to New York train, to station . . . it took a little while by buggy to go that. And I go there, I see kids in the street and they run and they dance and they sing. Oh, what a world! I just couldn't . . . I mean, I was so gratified to see this world. What a world! The kids singing . . . in our state . . . in our . . . nobody sang in the streets. This is [inaudible] . . . they would kill a man that would sing in the streets and dance in the streets like that. And it took a little while, maybe with the horse and wagon and everytime that the driver would stop and I didn't know what for, and now I know what for, he used to stop at every saloon to take a drink. See? So he used to stop and all of a sudden, finally I reached the station and he told the other down there, the conductor, that he had to put me on the train to send me to Wilmington, Delaware, because this here Sam Horowitz . . .

Q This is the man you met on the boat.

A Sam Horowitz's wife was my second cousin that came together with my elder sister to Wilmington and this is the first place I had to go to

land. That was my first stop. So with this sticker from New York, see, they shipped me by the ticket from New York to Wilmington, by train. And Wilmington and I come down [inaudible] . . . they also knew when they see the ticket, and they shipped me to Wilmington and wherever he lived . . . he lived on 311 East Third Street . . . I can't forget. I came in, the house was poor . . . it was a two-story house, brick house, but everything was not in shape, you know, the walls [inaudible] . . . and I came in October . . . I came in October. I came in October, that's exactly when President Wilson was inaugurated, on that Tuesday, Oct . . . November, rather, on November the third, 1912. They have President Wilson was then inaugurated for president and I came through the . . . he was my first president, President Wilson. And naturally the house when I came was already . . . had three kids already . . . three kids, two boys . . . or three boys and a girl. Then they took me upstairs and put me to sleep and I see snow right in the house, you know, from the windows and the doors . . . they put me under covers and I went to sleep and it was cold . . . it was poor place, you know what I mean? He had [inaudible] as a barber, he made maybe eight, ten dollars a week, it takes \$15.00 a month for the rooms or whatever he had, that first floor, for the first floor, and the second floor was occupied by somebody else, also paid \$15.00. Three, four rooms, you know . . . there was no bath, there was no . . . and it was poor. And I stayed with him. And the first week when I came over my father told me to send the money back, so I had to listen to my father what he said, and just like . . . naturally, not knowing too much of what . . . I didn't have enough vision of what's gonna happen to me, I'm alone. But I send my father off the 25 rubles, I remained with nothing. They were poor people and I had to pay them for the first day I stay there. They charge me three rubles--three dollars rather--a week . . . three dollars a week for room and board and washing, whatever wash I had, room and board . . . poor board and poor room. And he got me a little job. After the first week, he got me a job in an underwear factory. The name of the place was then Topkis's Underwear Factory. And they set me down to make . . . to sew on buttons on underwear. At that time they wore union suits and every suit had to be sewed on was nine buttons, seven on the front and two in the back. And they set me down to a certain kind of machine to sew buttons. They gave you no salary but immediately you had to do piecework. I never saw a machine in my life. I never saw a factory in my life. As I told you before, we weren't the poorest family, we didn't have to go beg for bread, we always had bread in the house, we always had potatoes in the house. We had a few chickens and we always had eggs in the house. We had a cow, we had, we could take a glass of milk every time and we didn't starve and we wasn't . . . we were what they call a middle class, you know, a middle class people. So once in a while maybe my father and mother would go to the theater . . . and when I wanted to go to the theater, I had to steal myself in. If somebody caught me, they'd beat the hell out of me. And the circus was the same thing, you know. Circuses used to come to town, it's a big town, big circuses used to come, we used to go under the tent, you know, us kids used to go under the tent to see what was going on. They dragged us out of there and beat the hell out of us, and we'd run away and come back. Well, however, in this United States here, I started

to work on this underwear. And they put me down on a hard chair, on a board, you know, and [inaudible] . . . and sew, see the buttons to the machine and it was an electric and I have to sew it. And they gave me a bundle of underwear, a bundle is five dozen, and for each five dozen underwear that I sew on buttons, I supposed to get 21¢. And that was 700 buttons, for 21¢. I a young kid, everything was fast, I was fast, my hands was fast, you know what I mean, and I sat and started to learn, I break several needles, so the foreman comes over, a Jewish man by the name Rothman, he says, "Two more needles you break, you're out." Well, all right, so I tried my best not to break it. Took it slower until I broke in, for the first week I made myself \$1.75. I didn't have enough to pay my board. So I was in arrear for \$1.25. I owed them. So the second week I made already three and a half. And I paid off what I had. I gave 50¢ toward my other board. And after I worked myself in, I used to make a bundle an hour, already, 21¢ an hour. While it was working I made already as high in the first three or four months, I made as high as five, six and seven dollars a month, so naturally every dollar I saved, whatever I could. And that was in 1912, see. And that was in November or October. By 1913, while President Wilson was already as president, we had a recession already. In 1913 we had a recession and no work . . . all of a sudden there was no work in the factory. After I worked there [inaudible] months, I made already eight, nine dollars a week, there was no work. And so you hung around the factory, maybe work will be in, all of a sudden the machine wasn't good, it was a Singer machine, so I told Mr. Rothman, "This machine is no good." He said, "Well, if you want the machine to work for you, you take it over to the Singer Company in Philadelphia, have the machine fixed." How am I going to take it? I don't know Philadelphia, I don't know how to get it . . . he said, "Well, you'll find out. You take the machine and go." So he took apart the machine and give me the head. I put the head on my shoulders and I went to the Wilson Line . . . at that time it cost 25¢ . . . 25¢ for to go there and back.

Q To Philadelphia.

A To Philadelphia. I have to use my own 25¢, carry the machine on my shoulders to go to the Singer people to . . . they give me . . . they replaced the head, they gave me another head. Took the head back again on my shoulders and carried it back in the factory. After that they didn't want . . . no work to do, it was an hour or two or three a day, so it wasn't enough. So [inaudible] . . . at 311, was people lived by the name Goldberg . . . Goldstein. They had a store on King Street, on 3rd and King. They had a store . . . a general store where they sold pants and they sold all kinds of ribbons and some buttons and some yard goods and some shirts and some sweaters and some quilts and some . . . but not everything, a small [inaudible] store. And he kind of also . . . he kind of liked me and he told me one time, he says, "At 12:00 Saturday we don't work," he says, "you come on to the store, I'll give you a job for Saturday at the store." So anything to make a dollar, I go. I took the job and . . . they had a stand on the outside at that time, was [sounds like "barking"] stands on the outside, practically half of the store was on the outside. And you'd bark, you know, to get the customers to buy. And he set me on the outside and I had to stand and bark for



the customers to go and I stood from 12:00 and that time they closed the store at 12:00 at night. So from 12:00 at that Saturday 'til twelve . . . and after 12:00, you have to help to take the merchandise from the stands, another hour or so. And for this you get a silver dollar.

Q A day.

A From twelve to twelve, I had the silver dollar, and believe me, my friend, that silver dollar I'll never forget, and I still never forget in my life. My feet practic . . . and I was young, strong, I could take it. My feet broke off already. And I cried so badly on Sunday, but that dollar . . . that I'll never forget it. The hardest dollar I ever earned. After this, see, after this, naturally . . . I have to do it, I have to do it, so . . . it wasn't bad . . . wasn't much to do, so some other fellow in Wilmington by the name Kruger, he was also . . . he was in the wholesale of the same kind of stuff, a little . . . stockings he sold wholesale and [inaudible] wholesale. And he had a brother-in-law in the south down here and [inaudible] in the country, called Pocomoke City, Maryland. His brother-in-law had a little store in the country, the country didn't have no more than about four or five hundred people population. And he had that little store with clothing and with stockings and with pants and stuff and that, and he made a nice living, but he told me . . . he grabbed me one time . . . no, that was already that far . . . while I was working you know that Saturdays, there was another place here at corner of 3rd and Market that they named Cohn and Finkelstein, they used to run as a department store already. They had [inaudible] . . . and they also had . . . somebody recommended me and I went down and they gave me a . . . and they done wholesale business, too. That was already wholesale business in '13 and '14. And they also . . . they give me a job for \$6.00 a week. And it was a four-story building and for \$6.00 a week I had to clean all the stories like a janitor, sweep every floor, take care of the heater, take out the ashes, and in the [inaudible] you have to get in and help fixing up the merchandise, on a Friday and Saturday you have to stay and sell. And that whole week . . . it was a four-story building . . . it was at that time . . . there was no elevators, you know, merchandise . . . he was wholesaling and retailing . . . merchandise used to come in in cartons as big as this table and about five, six foot high in wooden cartons--not in cartons, but in wooden cases. And you helped to help pry the cases open with something, you know, with pliers and whatever it is, you know, to open 'em up, take the merchandise out and carry it upstairs on the second and third floor. And I worked there let's say about a couple of months. A couple of months I worked, and on Saturdays . . . and [inaudible] on Saturdays I used to apply myself more to selling because I easily kept . . . I've gotten my speaking very easily, it didn't come hard to me to learn how to speak English, you know. Of course, I'm still not a perfect English speaker, you know what I mean, but I mean I spoke a little more than the average immigrant came in. I learned it faster. I could converse a little bit better than some of the others. So I started to sell some of the pants and some of the boys' stuff in the store, and he kind of liked me. And that's all for \$6.00 a week. I was able to pay \$3.00 a week board, I was able to get myself my shoes fixed, you know, sometime, and buy myself something,

a pair of pants . . . and that's all, I had no more left for myself. At that time, things were cheap, you know, movies was 5¢ and grapes, you know, in the stand, you can go . . . I couldn't buy 'em, but I could go and look at 'em, see. But they were 5¢ a pound, you know, once in a while I'd buy a pound of grapes, you know, for 5¢, splurge myself. So . . . however, I worked there for three months, and all of a sudden on a Saturday, I received in my envelope \$8.00. Now, listen to this, this is something for the books. I received \$8.00 in my envelope, and Finkelstein was a liberal man and was a social-minded man, see, and was a learned man. He's still living, you know, Mr. Finkelstein. He's in the . . . he's the head of the Jewish Federation, a fine, learned man. But listen to this. Naturally as a honest [inaudible] boy and the boss hasn't come over and told me I'm a good boy or "You deserve a raise and we're raising you \$2.00," when I received my \$8.00 myself in the envelope, I thought to myself, well [inaudible] . . . and it was 12:00 Saturday night when they were closing up and Finkelstein was upstairs in the office, I says . . . and I couldn't get away with that. I says [inaudible] for me to go and thank Finkelstein for the raise that he give me. So I go upstairs and I says, "Mr. Finkelstein, I got \$8.00 in my envelope and I came to thank you for the raise." He didn't say two words to me. He takes my envelope, takes out the two dollars, gives me the envelope back with the \$6.00, didn't tell me thanks, didn't tell me I'm an honest boy, didn't tell me nothing, walked away . . . I walked away. And I tell you, this thing hurted me so bad I couldn't work there anymore. That's [inaudible] . . . but something bothered me, you know, and I couldn't work. And at the same time, in the same week, that Mr. Kruger some way or another heard of me and he told me he's got a brother-in-law in Pocomoke City, Maryland and that he would like to have a boy and that I'm gonna get . . . they're gonna start me off at \$5.00 a week and room and board. Well, [inaudible] . . . that's what I want. So I said yes, I'll take that. So I went down there, it was also a nice family, by the name Mr. Miller, and a little store, not a big store, have a few clothing, have a few this, a few that, and they had maybe four or five little girls with a couple of boys . . . they had a big family, but they made a nice living down there in the store and they gave me a room . . . gave me a room, a nice . . . very nice, clean room with [inaudible] bed bugs, but they give me nice food . . . the food was good, Jewish food, you know what I mean, and your bed, and somehow or another I make out. I made out the best I could, and they had another family that was in the same town, Miller's father-in-law, see. He was a rabbi or a [sounds like "shahut"] whatever you call that, he was there in that little small town and he had two, three boys that I could socialize with, you know what I mean, during Sundays. So I stayed there and every five dollar bill that I received, naturally I saved. A bank was about two doors away from me and I'd take the five dollar bill and put it in the bank every week. There was a movie house maybe a block away that cost 5¢ to get in but I didn't allow myself to get even that. I worked here for Mr. Miller and then he liked me . . . in fact, I got into the store so good that he used to go away to the . . . during the days he used to go away, leave the store to me and go away to the hotel to play pinochle. What the

hell, he had nothing else to do. He played pinochle and I tended to the store. So everything was good, and Saturday then he was in the store. But however I was there for about a year, a solid year. And every five dollar bill I saved, I had \$250.00 accumulated. And I got tired of that, I said, "Now, that's all I'm gonna work. I'm going to Wilmington . . . back to Wilmington." I've got already a little bit hold of myself and a little bit experience and the kids down there that was in the house they went to grammar school, I used to get their books and I learned myself a little bit, how to read, how to write, you know what I mean, a few things. My mathematics wasn't good, my writing . . . [End of side one of tape.]

Q O.K. O.K., so you're back in Wilmington.

A I'm back in Wilmington and I went back to Wilmington and got a job with the same Goldstein brothers that I worked on the stand, he gave me a job, at that time already 1914 . . . close to 1914 . . . '15, probably, and he gave me a job for \$9.00 a week. So naturally the board was still \$3.00 a week, but not at the same place, not at my second cousin anymore. I got myself another place and paid for the room \$1.00 a week and outside we ate . . . we ate outside it cost \$2.00 a week because dinner you could get for 25¢, you know what I mean, and so I didn't eat good, however it costed \$3.00 a week, and whatever that was left, you saved. And getting closer already to 1914, I hear the revolution started over there in Russia. That's when it started, in 1914 they started to talk about war and started to talk about revolution and all that and things are starting to pick up in the United States. Business started to get a little bit better and I worked at this place for \$9.00 a week in Goldstein brothers for . . . and another man comes over in about two months later with the name Haber, a couple of stores away, and he says he'll give me \$10.00 a week, or \$11.00 a week. So I told him and he said that's all he can pay, so I went down there to work for more. And that Haber also had a small little store. And I put the store in shape for him and I worked hard, you know, and [inaudible] . . . and it was before Christmas I came down there to work about a couple of months before Christmas. And I fixed the store up for Christmas and I had fixed the stand up for him on the outside and I barked outside for him to sell a lot of goods and they liked me like anything. And at the same time, when I was working at the shop, see, I was working at 5th and Walnut, and I had to go from where I lived, from 3rd and Walnut, to 5th and Walnut, I had to cross 4th and Walnut to get to the shop. On the corner of 4th and Walnut was a building with a store that an old man by the name Goldstein had . . . with a long beard . . . had a little store down there, a cigar store with postcard pictures and that, newspapers, maybe some comic books, and such as that . . . and when I worked at the factory, I used to go by the store and look in the window all the time, look at the comic books and look at the pictures, and I said to myself, "This is what I would like to get for myself. I think I could run myself a little store better than that old man." And that was in my mind all the time. So when I worked for Haber, before Christmas, you know, two months before Christmas, so after Christmas . . . and worked extra hours and everything else, but Thursdays he used to give me a half a day off. My half a day off was from 2:00. We worked from eight 'til ten, and so that was a half a day

All right. That's the way it is, that's the way it is. You have to work from two to ten all the time, anyhow. So after Christmas . . . so naturally I figured he'll appreciate it, and I hear people getting Christmas presents. So I thought he'll give me a Christmas present, so what do you think he gives me for a Christmas present? A two-and-a-half dollar gold piece, that was my Christmas present. My labor that I put in extra was a great more worth than that. Well, that's all I got, a two-and-a-half dollar gold piece. So I worked that month in January, then for some reason or another I felt like seeing New York. I already had a couple of dollars in my pocket, I had \$250.00 in the bank and I felt I wanted to see New York. So my second cousin, that Sam Horowitz [inaudible] . . . they had family in New York, so they gave me an address, you know, and I went to . . . they live Hester Street somewhere or Grant Street, whatever it is, and I went down there to stay with her [inaudible] . . . and I came into a family where they . . . the way they lived, you couldn't describe it the poorness of it. I had nothing in the cold of the house, cold and frosty, nothing to cover me, they give me a little place where I can stay, I pretty near froze overnight, shivered like anything else. The next couple of days, I went back to Wilmington. Came back to Wilmington the same week, I said to myself, "Well, I decided I'm going to go over and see that old man, maybe he wants to sell me the store." That was in 1915, in January or February, 1915. I go over there and I tell him, "Mr. Goldstein, I want to buy your store. Do you want to sell it to me?" He used to sell . . . he used to repair old [inaudible] and sell it, he was a glassman, used to sell glass and all that kind of stuff. He was an old man, maybe an 80-years-old man and a long beard . . . and he was the father to the Goldstein brothers where I worked. He said, "Yes, I'll sell you the store." "How much you want for the store?" He says he wants \$350.00. I said, "Well, Goldstein, I haven't got \$350.00. I've got \$250.00. That's all I got . . . and I'll give it to you." He said, "No, I give it to you for \$300.00." "I ain't got it." So I signed some kind of a paper for \$50.00. So we went to the magistrate, Glockman, there was a magistrate by the name Glockman in town, he made up the papers, made the list, \$15.00 a month rent and \$50.00 I pay off in six months already. So I went to work in my own store. And for my \$250.00, believe me, what I found was nothing. Dirt that I've never seen in my life, a man could accumulate in one place dirt like this old man had accumulated . . . broken glasses and dust that high. I can't describe you what it was. A couple of [inaudible] and I found maybe two, three boxes of cigars, I found a couple of bars of candy and maybe a couple of bars of chewing gum, about . . . a few postcards and so on . . . I found nothing. But I kept on, I said to myself, "Well, I'll try myself. I'll clean up the store, maybe people will like to come in." So I [inaudible] . . . take a scrubbing brush and water and stuff and I cleaned up, I made the store look like a doll. But there was no business . . . during the day . . . so the whole day, I used to come in . . . the store was supposed to open up at five, six o'clock because people go to work at that time at 6:00, and sell a few papers and stuff. So I used to come in at 5:00, open up the store and stay 'til 12:00, and the first couple of weeks all I took in was five, six dollars a day, seven dollars a day, and what could you make from \$6.00 . . . a dollar, dollar and a half. So

it was hard enough to make a living on. But however I said "I'll stick it out, I'll stick it out," and I stuck it out and I started to go back again to the same Finkelstein, he was already in the wholesale business called the Delaware Novelty House in Wilmington. And I came to him and that time I said, "Mr. Finkelstein, I have a little store, I want you to give me a little credit." I thought he'd do it . . . didn't know me at that time . . . says, "Well, we'll give you . . . start you off with \$10.00." O.K. [inaudible] \$10.00 . . . at that time they wore paper collars, and paper collars used to sell for 2½¢ apiece, 2 for 5¢. People wore a shirt with a paper collar. So they wore the paper collars a lot, had to throw it away, so . . . so I said give me \$10.00 worth of it and I sold it, I paid him the \$10.00, I said I want some more money, well, he'll give you \$15.00. That's how I had to build . . . build the store from scratch. And that Haber . . . that Haber that I worked for naturally had more merchandise in his store and my customer comes in and he wanted a pair of underwear, I didn't have underwear in my store. So I used to run over . . . in the meantime, keep the customer in my store, go over to Haber and pay him for the underwear . . . he used to give me off maybe a quarter on the underwear and I got a shirt or two and I brought it right back to ask my customer to wait. He waited, I got back and brought him the underwear and I sold it . . . I made a quarter profit. That's how it was. And the same way . . . now it came on 1915, 1916 already I . . . the Mr. Horowitz, the Sam Horowitz recommended me as long as I'm already . . . the store was [inaudible] and I started to build a little bit . . . I took in \$15 and \$20.00 a day and so I build a little by little bit, I should get married. I was 21 already at that time. So who . . . I don't know nobody . . . so he recommended one . . . well, naturally the people that I went to see in New York, there was a young lady there, was a fine girl, was a very nice, tall, beautiful brunette girl, she worked in the shop as a vest maker, but he says that the family didn't have nothing . . . they were poor as church mice. He used to peddle some kind of a candy, you know, in a pushcart someplace and [inaudible]. And this Horowitz say . . . this way he talked her into me to get married so he said, "This way your wife will help you, your store needs [inaudible] . . . needs a lot of hours." Well, I figured, well, O.K., so I got married in 1916. Got married in 1916 and United States started to get into the war, and you had to get yourself drafted, you know, to be . . . signed as a draftee. By the time I reached to get signed, I had a child born, my little girl was born at the same night when I had to be registered for the Army. So naturally I had to be registered as the father of a child, father with one child. And I was flushed immediately to class three or four, whatever it was. And by the time it reached me, the war was over. So it's all luck, see what I mean? The war was over, so I didn't have to go to the Army. In the meantime, my store started . . . well, during the war days, du Pont had started to make his power down there in Penns Grove and employed all kinds of hobos from all over the world, and they all used to go by my store. They had to go on the Wilson Line boat and during the Wilson Line . . . came off of the Wilson Line, all had to walk by my store.

Q What was the address of this store, now?

A Huh?

Q What was the address of the store?

A 4th and Walnut . . . corner of 4th and Walnut Street . . . 301 East 4th. 301 East 4th . . . corner of 4th and Walnut. Everybody . . . in fact the pleasure riders that used to ride for the Wilson Line for 25¢ from Wilmington to Philadelphia or from Philadelphia to Wilmington, they all used to go by my store, you know, and I used to sell a lot of postcards and stuff like that. I built up . . . started to build myself up pretty nicely. So this is the only store I had . . . from this here store I built what I built for 53 years, I built a store . . . I've done as high as \$200,000 a year. Well, there's a lot more to tell between . . .

Q Where is this store that you finally wound up in?

A The same store. I never got nowheres. But there's a lot more to say but now I'm ready for my lunch, so if you want to . . .

Q Well, I want to thank you very much.

A If you want to come some other time, we'll talk over some . . .

Q No, this is fine.

[END OF INTERVIEW]