EI-104
SARA MILANOW (CHANGED TO MILLER) ROVNER
BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 1908
INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 4, 1991
AGE AT INTERVIEW: 83
RUNNING TIME: 1:17:38
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: DENNISPORT, MASSACHUSETTS
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: JANET LEVINE, 4/1992
AND JOHN MURIELLO,4/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

POLAND, 1925
AGE 16

SHIP: "THE ESTONIA"
PORT: DANZIG
RESIDENCES:

- **POLAND: DUBNO**
- **US: BOSTON, MA; DENNISPORT, MA**

LEVINE: Sara Rovner.

ROVNER: Rovner, R-O-V-N-E-R.

LEVINE: I'm here in Dennisport, Massachusetts. It's October 4, 1991. Mrs. Rovner came from Poland, what was then Poland, in 1925 at the age of fifteen. Why don't we start by you giving me your birth date.

ROVNER: Oh, I was born 1908, September 22nd.

LEVINE: Okay, and what town were you born in? Where were you born?

ROVNER: The city is named Dubno.

LEVINE: If there are any names, by the way and you can spell them just so...

ROVNER: Dubno is just the way it sounds.

LEVINE: D-U-B-N-O?

ROVNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

ROVNER: Of course, I lived in Dubno but I was born in Fam.

LEVINE: Oh, well now you lived in Dubno for most of the time before you left?

ROVNER: Well, we did live there because my mother worked in the fields. We didn't hear from my father from 1912 to 1920. He couldn't locate us because the war started in '14.

LEVINE: And he had left in --

ROVNER: He left 1912.

LEVINE: 1912, and you heard from him a little bit and then the letters stopped coming?

ROVNER: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh, huh.

ROVNER: And we didn't hear from him, and they -- he didn't know where to locate us because we were refugees. We were going from one place to the other. And finally, he located somebody in a different city and they located somebody they knew in Dubno. And he knew my uncle. This is how it started, you know, and they finally discovered. We got the address and we wrote him a letter and this is how it started. And from 1920 to 1925, we couldn't get out because he wasn't a citizen -- my father. So finally, when he became a citizen in 1925, we – we could go. But during the five years, it was just awful. My mother got a heart attack. She was very sick. I didn't think they were going to let her through. So we had everything that -- the money that he sent we spent on doctors. And finally she come out of it and she was okay. Then we were afraid that they wouldn't let my brother through because he turn—he was going to turn eighteen. They take him to the – in the army. But luck was there. We left before he became a citizen. We left before that.

LEVINE: Can you describe your life in Dubno during that period? Because you were only a baby up until four and a half or so before you left. Do you remember that place at all?

ROVNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember when you think of it?

ROVNER: See, all the villages were fighting. It was like a revolution. They were fighting with the Bolsheviks and they were fighting that they didn't want to let anybody in. So when Poland took over, they were afraid there's going to be an uprising again. So they went and they wanted all the ammunition.

The farmers wanted to give it u -- they should give it up. And they refused. So they came in and they burned the village where we lived.

LEVINE: How old were you then?

ROVNER: Roughly, oh about nine, I guess. 19 --1919, I was about ten. My mother left us four children with my uncle and she went to another village to find a place to live. And once she got there, the winters are so severe over there that she couldn't get back to the city for six months. Couldn't walk, too much snow. She had no one to take her. Meanwhile, the children were in the city. So my Grandmother lived too -- lived with us, too, and she, she took me to a place in town to this family. And don't fo-- that was after the war, you know--and this family had a grocery store, some kind of a store. And they had two children, a baby and a little girl, and I was supposed to be there and take care of everything. As I said, I was ten years old, and my Grandmother left me there with those people.

LEVINE: What was that like? What were the people like?

ROVNER: They were terrible. I had to, I had to go out and I didn't have any shoes. I had to go out in the yard -- bring in the wood and make the fire, make everything, get the dinner ready because they came home for dinner, take care of the baby, take care of the little girl four years old. And, well, I might as well tell you this. [sniffling] I was always ashamed of it. I got a splinter in my finger and my finger got infected. And it was all, you know, I thought they were gon -- I was going to lose my finger. And all my life I was ashamed of it. Lost my nail and everything. Never -- didn't go to a doctor or anything until that was healed. And with that finger, I had to wash the floor and do everything. Until spring, before finally my mother got a place. And she found somebody to bring her over to the city.

And she had to go get me from the place and you can imagine the reunion it was of course, because I was never away from my mother. In all the years, I've been always near my mother's side. When I – she came -- we came to this country she was sick, she was ailing. [tearful] Operations and everything, and I was right there with her every minute. When I got married I lived in Chelsea. It's not very far. I used to come down and take her to the hospital, take her to the doctor's. I always took care of her. When it came to move from Chelsea, I moved right around the corner near my mother so I could be with her and help her.

LEVINE: Tell me about your mother, what you remember from the old country.

ROVNER: Well, during the time, during the war, we were running from one place to another. They were shooting. And she protected her children. That's why she got a heart attack. She went through so much.

LEVINE: What did you have to do when people were shooting, what happened?

ROVNER: We were running. We were in cemeteries. We were sleeping in -- cellars. We were sleeping in – in barns and all kinds of places, you know. And the winter down there is so – so bad. You get up in the morning. It wasn't snowing at all. You get up in the morning. The snow is up to the roof. You can't even get out of the house. I didn't have a pair of shoes until I was twelve. So. And my father used to give money and try to, you know, maybe it will get to the family. It never did. We never even heard of anything. We never collected anything.

LEVINE: Did you remember your father at all?

ROVNER: No. No. I remember -- maybe my mother told me -- that he woke us up. He had to leave during the night. And he woke us up and he said goodbye [tearful] and to kiss the children and 'hept!' that was the end of it. I never remembered it. We -- when we came here and he came with a *landsman* [countryman] in – in Brooklyn, the two of them came down. And they took us in Ellis Island in a separate room where the people meet, you know. And those two men walked in. We didn't know who it was.

LEVINE: Your mother either?

ROVNER: She recognized him, yeah, but we didn't. It could have been the other man. He says my father. We didn't know who it was.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impression of him when you saw him? When you didn't recognize him and then you realized it was your father?

ROVNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought? How he struck you?

ROVNER: A stranger. We were always strangers. You couldn't get, I mean, you weren't brought up with him. It's just...

LEVINE: So the closeness wasn't there, even after.

ROVNER: No, it wasn't. We were always with my mother, always very close with my mother. He was a little jealous. He didn't like it, but that's the way it goes.

LEVINE: Now what did you, you mentioned earlier, that now we have the tape on, what did your father do before he left for the United States?

ROVNER: He was a teacher in the old country. He didn't have a trade. Finally, he got into it -- what they made caps. Years ago they made those caps, you know, with the visors. You don't remember. You were too young.

LEVINE: Like a driving cap.

ROVNER: You know, with the visors. He was a blocker. He was blocking them. That's a procedure to learn.

LEVINE: When you say he was a teacher but he didn't have a trade, didn't he teach for a living or he...?

ROVNER: Yeah. In the old country, yeah. (blows nose) But when he came here he didn't have a trade. So it was very hard at the time. It was very hard to get a job.

LEVINE: Well, how about religion? After he was no longer with the family, did you observe religious...

ROVNER: Oh, yes. He kept up his and we kept up ours. You know, it was really funny. I kept looking for the picture where they gave milk to the children on Ellis Island. We were there a whole week, you know. I was looking for the –for the bedroom where we slept. It's not there. They're going to have it but it's not there now. And the dining room isn't there yet. Right?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ROVNER: And I went on the third floor, there were the pictures there. I said, "That's it!" That’s -- I remember everything. That's what it was. This is how it was.

So now they really fixed it over. It's not the same.

LEVINE: Yeah, so tell me more about life in the old country.

ROVNER: Life in the old country --

LEVINE: [[interposed] Where did you? How did you?

ROVNER: -- the four years war, starvation, running from one place to another, duck -- ducking bullets. I remember when we were running from one house, we were running across the street, the house was bombed as soon as we left. And the mother was screaming. She lost three children. Just the youngest one was left out of four. My mother had carried the baby. She carried the other one with the hand, and the other – the -- myself and my brother were running after her. And one bomb was rolling on the road and she screamed, "Run!" We ran across the street and it exploded right there where we were. So that's -- that was a lot of things, you know, you remember because things like that are in your mind so much.

I remember when we're – when we came to the -- moved back to the village, my mother worked. Because the farmers don't pay you with money. They give you either potatoes or flour or whatever. We didn't taste a piece of meat for four years. Finally, when – when my – my uncle found out that he heard from my father,, he came to the village with his horse and buggy to tell my mother. My mother was in the fields working. So he brought one pound of meat and my mother cooked that and we sat down to eat supper. And I'll never forget. She kept, she made four portions, five. And we eatin' the soup. And I take a look. My portion's gone. I looked up and I said, "Ma, how about me?" She says, "Of course, I gave everybody the same." Take a look. My sister's got both pieces in her mouth. That's

how big it was. [gestures] She grabbed mine too. My mother started to cry. She says, "You poor kid, you always get --" You know, because I was the oldest, I was always just to get the end of it. So that's what I mean when you're starving. And there were times when the soldiers would knock on your door and you wouldn't know what to say, whether to speak Polish or speak Eng -- Russian, because they'll shoot you right through the door. This is how many changes they had, you know.

LEVINE: You mean, you wouldn't know which soldiers it was—

ROVNER: [interposed] No, no.

LEVINE: -- so you wouldn't know which language to speak.

:ROVNER: That's right. That's right.

ROVNER: It was pretty tax---. (blows her nose) That we went as -- we were leaving the village. We came to the city and there was another uncle living there. And he was all packed and they were leaving. And that was at the end -- that was October -- and it starts raining over there, mud up to here. [gestures] And they all walking and the little children are sitting. My uncle only had one horse and buggy. How much can you put on it? And we were all walking, and the little – the babies were sitting in the wagon and the horse was up to here in mud. We got to the city and my other uncle was all packed and we were going. Where? Don't know. Going to the city. We were going over there and there's a big fire. They burned the bridge. When the Russians retreated, they burned the bridge. But the Austrians got in somewhere. I don't know, with the boat or whatever. And as we were standing on the road -- and that was the next day, yeah.

The first day we got on the cemetery. There is a house on the cemetery where you bring in the dead people, you know. Well, that house was filled with people. You couldn't even get in there, but you did. Meanwhile, as-- my aunt had a baby and my mother had a baby. They were about the same age. The babies started to cry. So the people started to holler, "What are you doing that? You take the baby away because we're all going to be killed. Because the Russians were retreating. They were marching and marching. That's all you could see on the road. So my grandmother grabbed the baby, put it in the apron, and she ran out. She ran out and she ran into a house where it was all bombed. And she laid there with the baby the whole night.

Meanwhile, my uncle went looking for her and they stopped them on the way. They said, "Why are you in – why aren't you in the army?" He couldn't go because they, they rejected him. So anyway, he says, "You come with me." So he didn't want -- naturally, he didn't want to go with them. So he put his hand in his pocket. Whatever money he had, he took it out and he says, "Here, take it and let me go back." So he went back to the family. They couldn't find his mother, his mother with the baby, until next morning. Next morning finally she came back with -- and we went on the road and we started. We didn't know where to go but we were on the road right there going. So we take a look. See blue. They wore blue uniforms, the Austrians. So my uncle says, "Too late. They're coming."

And, you know, you don't know what kind of people they are. It's our enemy, naturally. First there was one on a bicycle. He comes over. Of course, my uncle knew how to speak German perfectly. So he says, "Any soldiers, any Russian soldiers?" He said, "No, they were marching the whole night. I guess they're all gone." So he said, "Where do you come from?" He said, "We left our homes. We're going. We don't know where."

He said, "You better go back," he says, "before we take over, the soldiers take over the places." You know. By the time we got back, it was filled with soldiers. We had no room. Well, anyway, we went to the officer and he told them to give us one room in the house so we could get in. So we were three families in one little room sleeping on the floor, and all the soldiers were sleeping all over the floor. The next morning we went back to the farm and that was, our house was taken. The soldiers were there and they gave us the house back.

We were there nine months. The Russians broke through and they came back. So that was in 19-- 1918. We lived on the farm. My mother was working in the field. We had food. We had potatoes at least. We had bread. You know, when the children were complaining they didn't like fish when I made for supper or anything, I said, "When I was your age, I didn't even have -- my mother used to say, 'This is the last bread.' We didn't know whether to eat it or look at it." (tears) So they used to make fun, the children, you know, they'd start with the violin. They'd say, "Oh, my mother, there she goes with her sad stories." So I never told anybody anything -- because is it -- it hurts too much when somebody makes a joke of it. I said, "You're lucky kids. You were born in the cradle of liberty." I says. "You don't know what it means to starve." In this country, no matter how poor you are, your children are doing fine.

LEVINE: Well now, the farm that you stayed at, that belonged to your grandparents?

ROVNER: Yeah, my grandfather was there years ago, but then we were all born there and we lived there on the farm. Ukrainian people are very good natured. They are very nice. And we were like their -- like their own, you know. It

didn't make any difference.

LEVINE: Now tell me the names of your brothers and sisters, kind of in the order that... You were the oldest...

ROVNER: No, my brother was the oldest.

LEVINE: Your brother was the oldest.

ROVNER: We were two years difference.

LEVINE: What was your brother's name?

ROVNER: Was Joseph. And then it was Samuel and Ida and Sara.

LEVINE: Okay, let's say now, you finally heard from your father. He was able to get a letter through to your mother.

ROVNER: Yeah. Then he started to write to us and he told us that he was going to take us, you know, to America, and we thought (ha,ha!) it’s going to be easy. But it wasn't that easy. (sniffles).

LEVINE: So how did it come about finally?

ROVNER: The first hundred dollars my mother received from him, she went to Warsaw. You've heard of Warsaw, it's a big city. At that time, they had a holiday with all the foreigners because they -- they knew that they were sending money to them. And they had a lot -- a lot of people that they tried to get away the money from them. Well, my mother, she had to go to the HIAS, they called it, to get the papers. First, she went to the bank and got

the hundred dollars. This old man, he says, "Oh, are you going to the HIAS?" He says, "I'm going to my – going to America. My son lives there." So she figured an old man, you know, who can you trust? So he says, "Okay, I'm -- if you come with me, I'll --I know where it is." So she's walking down with him. He took her into a place. You see. Down there, the buildings -- you walk into, it's an iron gate. And they open it up in the morning and you go in and then you find by number the different departments. It's like a court. Do you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Oh, yes.

ROVNER: He brought her in there, and she saw right away it was the wrong – the wrong place. He disappeared. Two other men jumped out with a gun and took her money. And she didn't even have money to go home, from Warsaw to go home. So that was-- that was the first experience my mother had. And it was a good thing where she stayed with those people, they gave her the money to go home. They bought the ticket for her by train to come back home. And it's a lot of things. A lot of things were going on. I was – my mother -- I stayed with my mother for about, took care of her for about two months. She – she went to the doctor. He wanted to know who the nurse was, and I lost 30 pounds.

LEVINE: When was this?

ROVNER: When my mother got the heart attack after that trip. Yeah.

LEVINE: So she came, were you at the farm then when she came home?

ROVNER: Oh, no, no. We lived in the city. As soon as we heard from my father we moved to the city and we figured we'd be going to America soon.

LEVINE: In Dubno? Is that the city you were in?

ROVNER: Yeah, yeah. It took us five years to get there.

LEVINE: So then what happened then? Your mother had the heart attack. You took care of her. And then what? Your father sent now more money?

ROVNER: Well, sure. We wrote to him and told him. Sure.

LEVINE: And then...

ROVNER: Well, see, then there you could live on a dollar a whole week. An American dollar, because an American dollar was between nine to eleven and sometimes twelve dollars of their money. So it was enough for us to live on it. But all the money went for papers and for everything else.

LEVINE: Well, did you have a chance to go to school at all while you were there?

ROVNER: Oh, no. You see, down there you had to pay to school. It's -- there's no, it isn't like in this country.

LEVINE: Not public education.

ROVNER: That's why I was so hungry to learn. I used to -- my cousin would go to school and I would copy her papers and I would read her books and I would, I was self-taught. In fact, the last, -- a year before we came here, my mother hired a teacher, a high school boy, and he -- I accomplished in that year more than if I had gone five years to school.

LEVINE: Really, now what did he teach you?

ROVNER: Everything. Three or four languages, too.

LEVINE: Really!

ROVNER: Yeah. And you know -- I must tell you this. When we – when I – when he was teaching me geography, and I – I saw a picture of a – of an African man, I said to him, "What about these people? I says, "They're black." And he says, "Oh, when you come to America you'll see plenty of them." Well, that stuck in my mind. When I came to this country and we stopped in Brooklyn, I met this beautiful blonde girl. She was my age and we became very friendly. I don't know if she went to Chicago, I think. Never saw her again. We both walked out on deck. We were standing looking around, you know. Meanwhile, I take a look. There's a lot of colored people. You know, black people working on the ships, you know, the dock. And they waved to us. They saw two girls standing there. The girl says to me, "Oh, my God! Let's get out of here! What kind of people are they?"

LEVINE: She had never seen them either.

ROVNER: She never saw a black person before. Not in Russia. And that's in – there's no black people there.

LEVINE: So were you scared also?

ROVNER: I wasn't scared. So I says to her, I says, "I saw it in the geography book." I says, "I saw the man." I said, "They come from Africa." Well, she didn't know. And she was so frightened. I said, "Don't be frightened." I said, "They're people. They're good people." And they were waving to us, and

she said, "Well, let's get out of here. Let's go downstairs. I don't want to stay here no more." She was so afraid. The things you don't know, you're afraid.

LEVINE: Right. You were, so your mother recuperated from the heart attack.

ROVNER: Yes, thank God.

LEVINE: And then your father was sending money and you actually could live fairly well on what he was sending you from then on?

ROVNER: Not fairly well, but uh...

LEVINE: You could eat, at least.

ROVNER: We could eat. We lived with my uncle. He gave us a room so we all were in the same room. By the way, I hadn't slept in a bed until I was twelve, until I came to this country. My mother would have her bed made out of wood and straw, and the table was over here like this, and we lived with another -- she was a widow and she had one little girl. She slept on that side, was her bed. By the way, one room. Everything is one room. And from the table on the floor , we had a bag with straw which he put it in -- we used to bring it in and put it down on the floor, and the four of us were sleeping on the floor. In the morning, the landlady would open the door and the little pigs would come in, the chickens would come in, and she would feed them because it was too cold to go out to feed them outside. And we were sleeping right there. And even the cow would put her face in, into the --. It was nothing. I mean, that's it. (sniffles) But the time during the war when we had to sleep in the cellar wasn't so good. Because cellars down there are not like here. The cellar is just dug – dug out.

LEVINE: It's earth.

ROVNER: It's earth. What they do is they use it for potatoes, to keep their onions and stuff for the winter, you know. And we had to sleep there.

LEVINE: So did you have to stay there like for days on end? You were used to staying inside.

ROVNER: Oh, yes. Sometimes a whole week and sometimes more we had to sleep there. Because we would run into the house, they would start shooting, and we had to run back. There were times we were sleeping in the barn with the animals.

LEVINE: Do you have any fond memories of living there? When you think of that place is there anything that you think of that brings a smile?

ROVNER: No. Misery every day. Misery and no clothes to wear. My mother used to make shoes out of old cloth, you know, like – like slippers. We used to wear that. I would wind her feet around with rags. Come winter time, we'd stay in the house. We didn't go out because it was too – too cold to go out. Didn't have any shoes. And I had trouble with my -- with my toes. They uses to, they were frost-bitten until I came to this country. I had to go to the doctor and they gave me medicine to heal it.

LEVINE: Did you know how to read? Like when you had that tutor right before you came...

ROVNER: Oh, yes. I knew how to read Polish, Russian, and my own language.

LEVINE: What's your own language? You mean...

ROVNER: Well, I'm Jewish.

LEVINE: Did you speak Yiddish?

ROVNER: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That's the way they speak of it. And I still write it. I have a cousin in Israel – they still. I'm the only one left that can still write a letter to her.

LEVINE: Who taught you how to read? You taught yourself?

ROVNER: I even – I even was teaching my youngest sister and brother. Whatever I knew, used to teach them.

LEVINE: How did you do it?

ROVNER: My mother didn't know how to sign her name. And she – she said she was so anxious for the children to learn how to – how to read and write. And when I came to this country, I went to night school because I had to go to work. And I graduated in ''29 from grammar school. Then I found out that the high school has night school. I went there three times a week and oh, yeah. And I knew how to write the real script of German, too. (laughs) I can read and write it.

LEVINE: Good for you, but I'm curious. How did you teach yourself to read? I mean what did you do. What did you look at and how did you know what word...

ROVNER: When you have an alphabet book, you can very easily, if you know the alphabet, you can – you can pronounce words, you know. And you

practice and you learn how to write. And I remember my mother bought me a pencil, and I lost it. And I cried for a week.

END SIDE A TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE B TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Okay, so now how did you finally get to come here? Your father sent enough money, so you had the tickets. Did your mother go back to Warsaw?

ROVNER: We had to keep renewing, and then I couldn't be in my mother's passport so I had to make a passport separate, and it all cost money. All this! They love this. They milk you dry. (blows nose)

LEVINE: So the younger children could come on her passport, but you couldn't.

ROVNER: Yeah. The youngest two were with my -- I don't know what happened to her passport. It must be my sister's house, and, uh...

LEVINE: Did your mother have to go to Warsaw again?

ROVNER: Oh, yeah. And then we stayed a week in Warsaw before we came here.

LEVINE: What was that like? You were waiting...

ROVNER: Oh, sure. And then they sent us from there to a city, Defarova [ph], I think. I had the picture of it someplace. So anyway, this, down there we stayed a week.

LEVINE: In Danzig? You mean when you were about to leave?

ROVNER: No, before Danzig. We took the ship from Danzig. That was the last day they shipped us over there. But before that we were there a whole week, and doctors and nurses and showers and God knows what – what we went through.

LEVINE: From the steamship line? You were being processed by the steamship line?

ROVNER: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. Oh, yeah, yeah. . And finally I remember one afternoon they put us on the train and they shipped us to Danzig where the ship was waiting.

LEVINE: Now. What did you know about America at that time?

ROVNER: Nothing much.

LEVINE: Had your father written things to you?

ROVNER: Yeah, he wrote what a free country it was. And how -- oh, boy! I'll never forget. I was walking from work and the policeman on the beat, you know, we were in Boston. We lived in Boston then on Shawmut Avenue. The kids were after him. One is hanging on his coat and one is hanging on his foot, and he's fooling around with them. I was stunned. I couldn't believe it. I stood there. I said, "My God!" When we saw a policeman we used to run and hide because I knew here comes trouble. So, that's what a free country is. Of course, a lot of people in the old country, they think gold is on the streets, but that is not true. That isn't it.

LEVINE: Did you think that?

ROVNER: No. Well, I was told, but I said, "No, that's not true." I said, "There must be something else. The living in this country must be something that it's more than gold." I found out.

LEVINE: So do you remember how you felt when --

ROVNER: [interposed] When I came?

LEVINE: -- you realized you were about to take the ship and come here?

ROVNER: Crying. Fourteen days on the water. Sick. My mother was so sick that one night we had a big storm and I think we had a hole in the – in the ship. But they didn't tell us. And I had to run to get the doctor. You know. From the third class, you've got to walk upstairs and he's on the first floor. And here I am going upstairs and I'm -- I fell down all the stairs, rolled down.

LEVINE: Because the ship was rolling so.

ROVNER: Sure. I get up and I'm walking up the stairs and again I'm falling. And I didn't feel good myself. We were all sick. And one of the sailors saw me. And they was – they were -- some of them were talking Russian and some of them German. It was a Russian-German ship from the First World War. It was an old ship. And he came, picked me up and he says, "What's the trouble? What's the trouble?" I says, "My mother is very sick. Please get the doctor." He said, "You stay here. I'll get him." So he went and he got the doctor and he gave her some medicine. That was – that was a trip.

LEVINE: Were you able to eat anything during those fourteen days?

ROVNER: No. We didn't even go upstairs. Who could think of food? My God! That

little girl that I met, she used to bring us down some coffee or something, you know, something to drink because we couldn't go upstairs to eat. It was awful. Ship was terrible.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about that trip? About the boat? About the trip?

ROVNER: Well, when we went from Brooklyn to Ellis Island, and I knew this guy that he was a young fellow and he was coming from Russia. He was going to this country. And we were standing and looking and we saw the Statue of Liberty. And he says, "What a statue! Look how big it is!" You know, we were talking, talking to the other girl.

LEVINE: Because you hadn't heard of it particularly.

ROVNER: No, no, no, no. You see, as much as I was educated, I was self-educated. But I didn't know anything about things like that, you know. So. But the guy that was standing next to me, he says, "Oh, here is the beautiful lady." He says, "I was waiting all my life to get here to see her!" And I says, "What beautiful lady?" And he says, "Right there. You see how she is welcoming us?" And I says -- I kept looking at her again -- and he was coming from Siberia. He was a revolutionist in the czar time, and they arrested him and they shipped him out to Siberia. All the educated people were in Siberia. And they finally let him out when the Bolsheviks came. They let out a lot of them. He swore that he'll never be in Russia again. He wants to leave the country and he went to America. I turned around and looked at him and the tears are coming from his eyes. And I started to cry, too. This is how you feel when you see something like that. (cries) That, that was in my mind all these years. We can't forget things like that.

LEVINE: You had a nice introduction to have by someone that it meant so much to him.

ROVNER: Yes, yes. Because he was educated, he was going to college, and they arrested him.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impression of, well, let's see, you went then straight to Brooklyn and the boat tied up there, right?

ROVNER: The ship docked there.

LEVINE: Then you took a barge from the ship to...

ROVNER: You see, it wasn't a ship like they had now. They just had a barge. We were standing near the railing looking at the water.

LEVINE: So you saw the Statue of Liberty when you were on the barge?

ROVNER: When we were passing by, sure.

LEVINE: And then do you remember your impression of Ellis Island when you first saw that?

ROVNER: I liked it. I was on American soil. I liked every bit of it. The food was good. And, oh, I must tell you this. I said to my son, "I've got to see, there must be a picture where they served the milk to the children at 2 o'clock in the afternoon." And sure enough, we walked in the room. I said to my son, "Come here!" I said, "There it is!" And there's the little boy about two or three years old. You'll see it when you get there. Take a look at it. There's a little boy with blue eyes and blonde hair and he's got a paper cup. And

he was looking up to say, "Don't forget me. I'm right here." He wants his milk. I started to cry when I saw that because I was standing there too with my younger sister and brother. They were getting milk.

LEVINE: So you got milk every afternoon.

ROVNER: Every afternoon, yes, and the food was very good. Naturally, it was good.

LEVINE: Did they give you kosher food?

ROVNER: I don't know whether they had kosher tables or not, but they – but this is a funny story. My mother was very religious. Naturally, they all are in the old country. She says to the man, "We just had dinner at twelve, and we just had meat. Well, you know we can't have milk right after meat. We've got to wait six hours." I mean, it's so stupid, the whole thing. The man was no slouch. He says to her, "Lady," he says, "This is not real milk," because he wanted the children to have it because they were all undernourished. So he says, "We take coconuts and we break them, and inside there is milk, and the milk goes in there and you can have it after meat!" So my mother said, "What a country! Isn't that wonderful?" You know, she believed him. Why would he tell her a lie? She believed him. She said, "If that's the case, let them drink. It's good." She found out three or four days later, because we were there eight days. She says, "What a faker!" She says, "Now, I'm not – I'm not going to suffer for this. It's his fault." I said, "Yes, Ma. It's all right."

LEVINE: Do you remember about the sleeping arrangements?

ROVNER: See, this is what I was looking for. They had low beds. They were about ten inches from the floor. They must have been folding beds. I think they

have the picture upstairs that shows the beds.

LEVINE: They have set up a room with three tiers of beds. Is that right?

ROVNER: Yes, I was there. No, it wasn't three tiers. Maybe the men had it. But the women and children were in one room and the men were in another. And there was a long room and they had beds on each side of the room. In the middle you could walk through, you know, to each bed.

LEVINE: Was it clean? Was it comfortable?

ROVNER: Oh, yes. Clean! Of course! It was clean. And then, I was looking for the sink. There were a lot of sinks at the – at the --. And then I showered on the third floor. I said, "There it is!" We washed around every night there, right there at the sink. There was about ten of them. See, what they did is they chopped up the rooms. They made ‘em smaller. And they put glass, you know -- like, they made it like a museum. But before it was just one long room. And the dining room was the same way: one long room with long tables and you sat on both sides.

LEVINE: So you were there for eight days?

ROVNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you were waiting for your father?

ROVNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: That's why you were there.

ROVNER: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: And what were you thinking then? I mean were you worried that your father wouldn't know you were there?

ROVNER: Oh, no. They told us that he was coming to pick us up, but I guess he couldn't get away or something and we waited almost a week.

LEVINE: So you were relieved. I mean, you were already to America...

ROVNER: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And you knew your father was coming.

ROVNER: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: That wasn't a bad time for you at Ellis Island.

ROVNER: No, no, no. We knew that he was going to come pick us up. There was no --. Because we went through inspection, everything was fine. They didn't cut my hair. They didn't cut my mother's hair or my sister. We were – she made sure – we were clean. The wash—(laughs) my mother made sure.

LEVINE: Were you afraid you might get sent back for any reason?

ROVNER: Well, we were not sick. I was worried about my mother because, on account of her heart. I guess it wasn't catching. So that was okay. We were quite healthy. We were okay.

LEVINE: Now is there anything else? Any other surprises? Things that were new to

you that you remember?

ROVNER: A lot of things.

LEVINE: First impressions?

ROVNER: It was very tough when you come to a country you can't speak and you can't understand a word. I used to have little pieces of paper and I would write everything down, you know. My language and the [not understood] in English, you know. And I'd be walking, because there were quite a few, they followed me. I had one man follow me to work and I tried to, I tried to – to go across the street so he wouldn't know where I am and, sure enough, he crossed over and he followed me. And I got lost because I worked right in town near Filene's. And I got to Filene's on the corner and I did – and there's too many people and I couldn't speak. I couldn't ask which -- where to go, what to do.

And there were two -- these two little old ladies looking at me. They saw me nervous, you know, I was standing there on the corner, and she comes over and she says, "Anything wrong? Can I do something for you?" And I can't understand what she's saying. And I can't talk to her. And she says, "Oh, my God! There's something wrong." I could tell she was worried. I took her hand. I says, "Come." So she -- the two of them walked with me and I knew that around the corner was the shop where I worked, and I went around the corner and I recognized the building. And I -- kind of a smile went on my face and I said, "That's it. I got to go up there." She says to the other woman, "That's where she works." So I almost, I hugged her and I went upstairs and I called up my father and I said, "Come pick me up, take me home." I says, "Too many people are following me." I was kind of different because I had the long hair and he thought I was some kind of a

weirdo so he followed me. Anyway, he came over and he took me home, and he – then for about a week, he -- I walked with him to work. That was, uh...

LEVINE: Do you remember the bananas?

ROVNER: I know I'm going to kick myself later. When the ship docked in Brooklyn, the sailors went down and they bought bananas. And I mean bananas. They bought plenty. A whole, you know, carrying on the – on the shoulder. We were all out on deck, naturally, after so many -- fourteen days on the water, we were on deck and it was nice. The sun was shining. They came over and they gave each one a banana. We were standing, the whole crowd from downstairs, and everybody is looking at them and they don't know what it is. And I'm studying it. My brother says, "I'm not eating this." I said, "That's okay." I says, "If the Americans are eating it," I says, "I'm going to eat it. I've got to find out whether you peel – whether you eat the peel or you eat the inside." So I went and I broke it and I peeled it and I said, "That's what you eat. You eat the inside." And I bit into it . I didn't know what to do with it, to swallow it, or--. And I didn't want to give him – and I didn't want to give him the satisfaction that I'm going to throw it out. I'm eating it and I'm choking.

[pause]

LEVINE: -- orange before?

ROVNER: No. Oranges is very expensive. Only the elite would buy it, the rich people. Not the poor. Lemon we had. That's the only thing. We had tea. Oh, I must tell you this. While I was walking around looking at the, I went over to the Russian place where they have a samovar, and they have silver

and handmade stuff, a lot of it. And I'm looking around, and there was a crowed of senior citizen women that went to Ellis Island. And they, some of them were standing there, some of them walked away somewhere else. And one woman says, "Gee," she says, "What is this? The – the spoons are so big," she says. “That's the silver from Russia.” "They're so big. Why do they use such big spoons?" So I turned around and I said to her, "Well, I'll tell you why. They eat from one plate. The plate, a tureen, is in the center of the—of the table. Each one waits for the father to put his spoon in first. That's the respect they give their parents.

And as soon as the father picks up the spoon and he brings it to his mouth, everybody else does the same thing. And when you carry the spoon, you don't want to spill it on the table cloth. So they use big spoons so you can carry to your mouth." And they were standing there and they said, "How do you know so much about it?" I said, "I learned it." "Well!" And they called the other women over and they're standing around me and they want to know what the samovar is. And I tell them. I says, "The samovar, with a chimney, it has water around it"--there's a picture of it right there. "There's water and," I says, "as soon as it starts boiling --"--this is what I looked like, like this little girl here. Here, this is how I remember it. See? There's no lights. See any lights here?

LEVINE: Right.

ROVNER: That's the magazine they printed when --

LEVINE: When it first opened. Yeah.

ROVNER: Yeah. This the samovar. No matter how poor or rich you are, you have a samovar. That's on the f--, you see, you put the coal in here, the waters

around. And when that's finished, you take a little kettle and you put tea in it, steep tea. And the water comes out through here and then you take this off the chimney, and you put the tea on top so it steeped. And then you can have as many cups of – a – a -- you want out of it, you know. And then I'm explaining all this, and my son is standing over there. He's grinning from ear to ear. When I get through he says, "Well, you make a good guide. (both laugh) You make a good guide." So anyway, this is what happened to me, see?

LEVINE: From a samovar?

ROVNER: Yeah. My mother put it on the floor until it started to boil, and a customer came in. That was when we lived -- when my father was still home. I was about, I was crawling on the floor. I must have been five-six months old. And it was very shiny. This – this one isn't, but usually they -- it's brass so they shine it every week, you know, to make it shine. And I went over and grabbed it, stood up, turned it over. And I was right there. (gestures) I was all burned on the bottom. One foot is burned and one arm is all burned. I was lucky I didn't get it in my face. Well, they took me down to the hospital, to the city. It took quite a few hours to get there, and there was one blister. So they start to cut the blisters and my mother fainted. She was holding me. And they took me in the room and my mother said they did whatever they wanted with me.

Anyway, when they – when they got through they gave them a salve and brought me back home. And I was rotting in the crib. The salve didn't do anything. Until this little old lady came in and she says, "What are you doing to that child? She's dying." So he says, she says, "Well, I'll tell you what you do. You get peas and dry it and make powder out of it. Get linseed oil --" (which I know there's a st-- whole story about that, too, and

you -- they make their own oil from their own --. What I do with?. Oh, here it is. This is what grows. This is what they make oil from.) "-- put plenty oil on her and put the powder on her." The oil healed me and the powder dried, and I was healed. Never went to the doctor again. You see, we had no – they had no doctors where we lived. And, by the way, that – that village was so beautiful that they called it "Orchard". That was the name of it, Sade [*sod*].

LEVINE: This is where the farm is?

ROVNER: Yeah. Sade [sic] means orchard. All apples and cherries and pears and all -- all trees, the whole village was fruit, you know. We -- to get a doctor -- to get to the city, it would take us a whole day. You know, you start early in the morning and you get sun down. So it was [not understood] to get to the city, so they had to find all kinds of herbs, all kinds of things to heal people. You'd be surprised, it helped more than the salve that the doctor gave. So I have souvenirs.

LEVINE: Well now, tell me, when you got here and your father finally met you at Ellis Island and you didn't recognize him --

ROVNER: No.

LEVINE: No. Did your brother?

ROVNER: None of us did. My sister didn't know him at all. She was born after he left. My brother was only two years old, the other one.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother and how your mother felt about being reunited with your father after all that time?

ROVNER: No. What we did is we went down to Brooklyn, brought us over to their house. They made supper for us and we slept overnight there.

LEVINE: This was now at your uncle's house? Whose house?

ROVNER: No, this *landsman*.

LEVINE: Oh. This *landsman*.

ROVNER: And we stayed, and the next morning we took the train and we went to Boston.

LEVINE: Do you remember that train ride? Do you remember anything about it?

ROVNER: Well, it was amazing. I looked out the window and I saw, I thought I saw -- I'm seeing the whole country. (laughs) But it wasn't true. It -- it was – it was thrilling. And then he brought us over to my aunt's house, to his sister's house. We lived in an apartment in Boston and she lived there. Then we waited for the next -- next door. She lived on 120, we 118. We took the five-room --

LEVINE: Oh, so that was a lot of room.

ROVNER: It wasn't an apartment. It was a, a tenement they call it. With heat, we paid $45 a month. Can you imagine that?

LEVINE: How did you feel about that place, the apartment itself?

ROVNER: Oh, it was wonderful. I had my own bedroom with my sister. Oh. It was

the first time I slept in a bed. And it – it -- we-- on the second floor.

LEVINE: Now, was your father working on the hats then, because that was what he was doing?

ROVNER: Yeah, he was still working there. But, as I said, when you have no luck, some hard luck always follows you. You know what I mean? My father got sick. He got paralyzed. He was two and a half years in the hospital until he died. So it was pretty tough.

LEVINE: What did you do once you got there?

ROVNER: Oh, I – I looked for a job right away.

LEVINE: Right away.

ROVNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you find something?

ROVNER: I found, yeah. I found a job where he was, where my father was working -- in another shop with the same line. And I worked there for about a year or so, and then I heard that the J.A. Cigar factory, you know the J.A. Cigars? They don't -- see, she's too young to remember [to her neighbor present]. Do you remember the J.A. Cigar? They had a – a five-story building, all just making cigars. They took in machines and they hired girls. So I ran and I got the job. They start – they started me with $12 a week for six months, and then you joined a union and you go on piece work. A cigar maker -- if he's good and fast -- if he makes 1,000 a day, he's doing beautifully. Well, we made 5-6,000 a day by machine. And I worked there

for six years. When everybody else was out of work, I was making $35 a week on piece work. In other words, whatever I made, they pay me so much a thousand.

LEVINE: Now, did you then turn most of your money into your mother or how did you do that?

ROVNER: Yes, yeah, in the house. It all went in the house.

LEVINE: And did you –

ROVNER: We all worked and we all brought in the money.

LEVINE: And did you, you were going to school at night while you were working at that cigar...

ROVNER: Oh, yes. I gave up my best dates for that, for school. That was my school night, that's it.

LEVINE: And what was your social life like?

ROVNER: Ehh!

LEVINE: (laughs)

ROVNER: You see. What happened was, I used to be so crazy about my mother that --. When I had a day off, I didn't get paid for it. They'd give you vacation but they didn't – they'd lay you off. I used to iron, clean the house, go shopping. Because I always went shopping for my mother. I used to go in -- before I took the street car to get to work -- I used to go in the butcher

store and order whatever she wanted. And then on the way back, I would pick it up and bring it home.

LEVINE: Were there a number of people living in the area you lived in who were *landsmen*?

ROVNER: Yeah, there were quite a few people that --

LEVINE: So in other words –

ROVNER: --we used to associate with.

LEVINE: -- your mother and father or your mother could speak her own language and she could be understood.

ROVNER: Oh, yeah. [aside] What's that? What is it?

VOICE: Bread.

ROVNER: What's red? Oh, you -- you mean about the – Ehh. That's a long story. So anyway, but I'm going to tell you a little bit how I met my husband. You see, to me the American boys when they were my age they were kids. You see what I mean? I had nothing in common with them. I couldn't talk to them. I couldn't – I didn't like their actions and all that stuff. So I always associated with some – with my own crowd that came over from Europe. And they-- you know -- went through the same we did. And we had a lot of things to talk about. Until one day my si—my brother bought a ticket (that was in 1933), bought a ticket to a dance. It was a dance from the union that they laid off a lot of people and they went out of business. It was during Depression time, and they had made one dance and that was --

they called it a ‘ball’. So he bought the ticket and he couldn't go. So he says, "Here, you take it." I says, "What am I going to do with it? I'm going to go by myself over there?"-- without knowing that the upstairs neighbor is going with his wife and his daughter. Because he worked at the same trade, I mean the raincoat makers' union. So the wife came down and says to me, she says, "You come with us." I said, "Well, okay. I'll go." I got over there, it was in town, and I was bored. A lot of married people, a lot of older people, all kinds, you know.

And I went downstairs, they had like a sitting room, you know, with stuffed chairs, and I sat down and I says, "I wish this would be over so I can go home." And the girl was looking for me so she come down and she says, "Well, where were you?", she says, "My mother's looking all over for you. Come on with me." So I go upstairs and I take a look. This nice tall guy is standing talking to her. I said, "Where did he come from?" I didn't see him before. So I go over there and she introduces me to him and she says, "Well, meet Abe Rovner." I said, "Rovner?" I started to laugh. I said, "That's a funny name." I said. I says, "We slept overnight, we had a cousin in Rovner.” There's a city, Rovner, about an hour and a half by train to get to the other city from Dubno. And she wanted to say good-bye to her niece so we slept over there overnight and then we went the next day to Warsaw. I says, "Rovner,” I says, “I know a city Rovner, but I never knew it was a name." "Oh," he says, "it's a long story." He said, "This isn't really my name but,” he says, “It's a long story .” he says, ”And it would take more than tonight to tell you."

END SIDE B, TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE TWO

Years ago, when the czar (Nicholas or Alexander, I don't know which one it was) but that was years and years and years ago (his great, great

grandfather) the Jews were very bad off in Russia. So what they tried to do, he said, "Let's catch Jewish little boys and put them in a place, let them turn Russian, and they're going to serve twenty five years in the army." That's what they did. When they found out, his great, great grandmother – father -- found out that they were going to catch the kids at that ci-- little city, they sent him to an aunt in Rovner. She lived there. They figured when they get through here, they'll bring him back home. What happened was she kept him for a couple of months and she let him out to play in the yard and they caught him. They caught him, they took him away. He was about six, seven years old.

They told him, "Don't tell your name, don't tell anything. They ask you --" and this is what I went through, the same thing. "You don't know. If you don't know, they can't do anything to you." You see what I mean? They kept saying, "What is your name?" "I don't know." So they said, "He's a child. He doesn't remember, he doesn't know his name." They kept him in a home. They kept him. They sent him to school. When he grew up, when he was eighteen, they put him in the army. He served twenty-five years. While he was in the army, they wanted him to convert and he said, "No." and he didn't.

But he wanted to look for his family. So he found out where the family lived. And it was only a city -- in fact, we were in that city waiting for another train for about five hours in the station. And he says he wants to find out where his family lives, where his parents is. And he came to the city and he found his parents. He met a girl there and he got married. He served the twenty-five years in the army, and then – and that was the name that was left. Their name was "Summers." So, when he explained the name, I didn't laugh anymore. So anyway, he took me home, made a date with me again, and three months later he asked me to marry him. And he

was just the type that I wanted.

LEVINE: What type?

ROVNER: Like myself. His mother died when he was six. His father came to this country, left him with a step-mother with all the other children. Finally brought him over, so he went through a lot. You know what I mean. And all -- all that, the two of us were very happy. So what happens? I was married to him for seventeen years and he dies -- on his way to work. He left me with three kids, three boys.

LEVINE: What are your sons' names?

ROVNER: Well, my son's name the one that lives in New York, his name is Arnold. His middle -- the one, the professor, is Irwin. And the youngest one is Jack, the one that brought the visa is a lawyer. The – and --- my -- my son, Irwin teaches at the University in North Carolina. He just came back from, he's an archeologist, he – he just came back from Budapest. He was in China two weeks. The school sends him. He represents this country and he goes and they have a meeting with the archaeologists. So I'm very proud of my sons. Of course, he was -- he was very anxious to be educated, so was I. And he says, "Well, we can't do it.” He says, “But I hope our children will go through college and they'll be educated." So all three graduated Brandeis. Two of them went on scholarships. One, the middle one, is a retired commander from the navy. The other one, the youngest one, went to the Coast Guard and he's a retired lieutenant. You see, they all graduated college and then they went into officers' school.

(long pause)

LEVINE: Is there anything else that --

ROVNER; And –

LEVINE: -- you can think of that we might not have touched on?

ROVNER: And when my husband died, the youngest one was only four and one half. And they, I did just, I promised what I wanted, what I--. And I educate my kids and I did.

LEVINE: How did you get along after your husband died? Did you work?

ROVNER: Well, we were, we went into business for a while. And then I opened a wool shop. I still have -- I moved over here, I bought the house. And I made the garage a shop. That's where he comes in. (gesturing to her neighbor) And I was teaching how to braid and I was braiding rugs and I was selling rugs. Now you can pick up from here if you want to. (she laughs)

LEVINE: No. Go ahead. Wait, wait.--

ROVNER: Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot I had this thing. This, this is made --I don't know what they call it in this country --it's linseed, linseed. It's – it's they grow about that tall (she gestures) and they take – they have seeds on top. They take the seeds off. They make oil out of it. And the rest of it they make flax out of it. And then --

LEVINE: They weave it.

ROVNER: -- they weave it and they make all kinds of cloth, and that they use for

Russian shirts. See them wear over the –

LEVINE: Oh, yes.

ROVNER: Yeah. And they embroider different things, you know, and they make for the bed, they put on sheets. They make sheets out of it. It's rough, but – but they use it. So my mother brought a whole sheet and this is what's left of it. And I gave it to some kids to school to make a report, and they got an "A," every one of them, from this.

LEVINE: I see. Who wove this? Did your mother do it?

ROVNER: No, no. They had -- they couldn't afford to buy those -- weavers. One – one or two would have it in their fa-- you know -- and they – they all would bring it over. But what I'm trying to say is this: We would go (my mother would be working in another field) and we would go down -- children, myself and the younger ones -- and we would pull them out with the roots. And the hands used to be cut right here from pulling a whole day. And then the older one would come down and they would make bundles out of it. And stand them up to dry. Then, when they're through, they bring it home and they thrash them. They take off the seeds. Then they take these to the water. They soak them, take them out, and dry them. It takes about a week. Then they thrash it, and straw comes off and the beautiful flax comes out of it. And they take the flax, it's that color, and they bundle it. It comes winter time, they come down, they all get in one house, and they sit and they spin -- with the spin thing, you know, by hand.

LEVINE: Can you remember that?

ROVNER: Oh, of course. I used to do it myself. Some of them would have those little

--with the wheel, you know, with the foot. And they would go like, but they couldn't afford to buy these things. They used to do it by hand. They would hang it up on a stick and she'd sit on a chair and she would pull and weave and make it straight. Each -- some of them were very thin. You can see how thin that is. Some of them would make them thicker and they would make bedspreads out of them. They weaved them in different colors. They would dye it first and then make all kinds of bedspreads.

LEVINE: Was that pleasant? Was that like a social occasion, when everyone would get together?

ROVNER: Well, yes, yes. They used to get together and drink tea and have something to eat or whatever. Oh, sure. It was a lot of fun. Some of them were singing. We were all singing together. It was fun. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, it's nice to hear of a happy occasion that you had.

ROVNER: Oh, yeah. At harvest time, they would, the families would get together and they would cook and make all kinds of things. And they all get through with the field, you know, with the work from the fields and everyone of them would come home singing, the whole crowd. And, oh, it was so beautiful. That was harvest time.

LEVINE: Now do you think your interest in braiding the rugs kind of stems from this remembering of the weaving of the flax?

ROVNER: I did – I do a lot of things. I made my own clothes. I was sewing. I was doing everything. But then I realized when I was buying materials in places where they made coats and skirts and stuff, my neighbor next door was braiding a rug and I was looking. I says, "How do you do it? Let me see."

I just had to see it and I learned fast. I went down to --

LEVINE: This was in Boston? When you --

ROVNER: No, no. I moved here. And when I went down to the -- to buy things for the store, like skirts, they were seconds. And I used to fix them up, put zippers in and everything else and sell them cheap enough. It was a bargain store and I watched her braid and I says, "I'm going to start a rug for myself. I'm going to braid, too." I went down the shop and I said to the man, I says, in the cutting room, "Do you have pieces left from your woolen skirts, the wool stuff?" "Oh, yeah," he says, "but if I go in they'll kill me. I can't go in there. The cutters wouldn't let me." So anyway, he says, "I'll get it ready for you." So next time I came, he had a couple of cartons for me. Once or twice, and then after a while, I said, "I'm going to go looking for places where I can buy wool and sell it separate because a lot of people braid and hook here." So I had it down in the cellar. People went down to the cellar and they were picking and they were, you know, they thought it was wonderful. And they weighed it up on a scale until I sold my -- I gave up my clothing shop and I made a shop, a wool shop.

I made a lot of friends. I used to, I had a long table in there and people would come in and sit around the table and they'd braid and I'd show them how. And the woman would say to me, "Yeah, I taught her how to braid and now she knows better than I do," because her rugs weren't so good. Anyway, every rug I made, I made it different. Then I put a rug in a store to see if I can sell it. And sure enough, this woman came down and was --. The Chamber of Commerce was across the street. She went over there and she said, "Where's that lady that braids?" She says, "Right there." She says, "And I'm drooling. I'm looking through the window. I'd like to go down and see – and see her so she could teach me how to braid." She

came in. She gave me an order for a rug for a room-sized rug to make for her. And I did, and this is how it started. And I was braiding rugs until this, you know the Stop and Shop, don't you?

LEVINE: Um-hmm.

ROVNER: Well, the owner from the Stop and Shop, the rebs [ph], that's why he put that there. (laughs) She came over and she wanted to know would I take the job to make rugs. They just built a new home in Marsons Mills. So she sent over the chauffeur, and she picked me up and I went over to the house, and I looked at the house, and I says --. I made three rugs. She has, her living room -- their living room was three conversational sections. So I made three 8 x 10, 9 x 12 rugs in there. And for his bedroom, and I made quite [not understood] for them for quite a while, quite a few years. And then there was an interior decorator. He came down and he -- made a rug for him for his own house and then for a customer. And that's what I'm – that's what I've been doing ever since, making rugs. But I retired. At 83 I guess it's enough. This guy came down and he says, "I don't know. I'm making rugs. My grandmother made it but it doesn't look like yours. How about it?" So I showed him how. And now he braids and he make and sells them. He goes to different places where they have. you know -- he hires a table.

LEVINE: Beautiful. Okay. Is there anything else you care to say in closing?

ROVNER: No. I'm going to kick myself later, I know it. I'm going to remind myself.

LEVINE: Of other things. Well, anything that you can think of about life in the old country, coming here, being here, your life in general?

ROVNER: Life in the old country is a terrible life unless you're rich and you can afford it and you know – you're in business or you're a big shot. Otherwise, poor people -- very bad, very bad. I remember, they -- you see what they used to do, the Ukrainian people can be educated. The czar didn't want them to be educated. And that's the bread basket. If they ever break away from Russia, they might as well forget it. They give up. It's -- they know they work in the fields and that's their -- but they wanted to be educated too. So they opened a school -- they would come down – come down and close it. Close it. Wouldn't -- none of them, they don't know how to sign their name. Now they do because when they killed the czar they opened up schools everywhere. They wanted everybody to be educated. That was one good thing about it. But not then. So education was very, very bad.

But I remember when they opened -- when the Polish came in, they opened a school in the next town. So this woman says, "You come and stay with me and you'll go to school." So I went because the woman she knew, I couldn't eat this and I couldn't eat that. I was very religious. So she would -- I would bring with me a little pot, a little dish, a little spoon and everything. So she served me separate. And I went to school and I was so tickled to go to Polish school. I sat there and I remember, that was from the church. And this handsome priest came in once a week to see if everything is all right. And he says, "How many Russians do you have?" She says, "Two." She says, "But I have a Jewish little girl here, too." And he says, "Really? Stand up." So here I am. I'm so shy, you know. I stood up and he says to me, "You like this school?" I said, "Yes. I like any school." I says, "This is my first school," I says, "and I love it." "Good," he says. He turned around to the teacher and he says, "Now, don't make her pray when the rest of them are praying." So I said, "That's okay. I don't mind." I says, "I can put my hands this way." Because, you see, I was brought up in the – in the farm. You know, I was brought up with all these

people and I used to go to their – to their church. I used to go to the dances. I used to go to their weddings. You know, I was just like their own. That's what they used to say. "She doesn't look Jewish. She looks like a Ukrainian." (they laugh)

LEVINE: So there was no anti-Semitism that you ran into.

ROVNER: Oh, no. Not where I was. Oh, no. They would do anything for you. Plenty of times I used to go in and I didn't have enough to eat in the house and they would have milk on the table and bread and butter and everything right there. "Eat, eat, go ahead!" And they would give me a lot of stuff to bring home, too." No. They were wonderful. They were very nice. In fact, I have Ukrainian people friends here, too. Yeah, she calls me. Her son graduated with my son from high school and they still friends. And he has an inn over in New Hampshire, her son. And my son goes down there and stays there a few days.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else?

ROVNER: Oh God. I don't know. There's plenty but I can't think of anything right now. It's just --

LEVINE: Well, you had so much, such an interesting story to tell and I thank you.

ROVNER: There's a lot of things in here.

LEVINE: I think we've pretty much covered that. Yeah.

ROVNER: I would like a copy of this if I could.

LEVINE: Thank you very much. I'm very happy you would talk with me.

ROVNER: I'm trying to think. Did I leave anything out? I don't know. There was a doctor. He's in Philadelphia Hospital right now. He got married. There's a picture here.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off, having spoken with Sara Rovner here in Dennisport, Massachusetts on October 4, 1991.