

EI-1414  
IRVING INGBER  
BIRTHDATE: 1906  
INTERVIEW DATE: 2005  
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 99  
RUNNING TIME: 1:35:02  
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE PH.D.  
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME  
INTERVIEW LOCATION:  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: STEVEN MICKLOVIC  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

GERMANY  
AGE: 4

SHIP:  
PORT: HAMBURG  
RESIDENCES:  
? AUSTRIA:  
? GERMANY:  
? US: NEW YORK, NY; BRENTWOOD, LI

LEVINE: -- 1906 (which makes him ninety-nine and a half at the time of this interview) and so we think -- since he was four years old -- it was like 1910 or 1911, somewhere in there, that he came to this country. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and if we can start, were you born - was your name Irving Ingber when you were born?

INGBER: No.

LEVINE: (laughing) Ok, what was your name?

INGBER: Azik, the Jewish name. I should have changed it to Isaac but years went by and I keep changing it. I - I graduated - graduated public school and under the name of Isadore (laughing).

LEVINE: Well, were did you get all these names from?

INGBER: I don't know, the school -the -- what the (laughs). [not understood] was beyond my recollection of -

LEVINE: Yea, well now how do you spell the Jewish name for Isaac?

INGBER: I-S-A-K, that's how they did it in the Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, ok.

INGBER: See, you gave -- My father didn't speak English and neither did my mother so they said everything in Jewish and they put it down that way.

LEVINE: I see, well so who did you come to this country with? Who was with you when you got to Ellis Island?

INGBER: My family - we had three --three brothers and one sister. Yea -

LEVINE: And your mother and your father -

INGBER: My mo - my sister was a baby in my mother's arms when she arrived here and we were sponsored by relatives. My mother's sisters were well off and they managed to get us in this country. They helped, yea.

LEVINE: So - so, were you the next to the youngest?

INGBER: Yes, my sister was the youngest, I was next to her. But ah - did I mention on the ship that we -

LEVINE: Well, first let me say - if you can tell me what you know from your mother and father about --- they started out in Austria and then why did they leave Austria, do you know?

INGBER: Well ah things were very bad there, very bad. And my father worked in the salt mines and he couldn't take it anymore and the pay was terrible and also---- [drinks] also --..

LEVINE: Did you have - did you have grandparents? Were your mother and father's parents in Austria?

INGBER: That's right. My grandfather had nineteen children. He was a very religious man - he never worked. The children, they grew up, they had jobs in different p--. My mother worked as a bar - a barmaid in a saloon (laughs) and that's how they got through. They never had shoes in the winter and they had very small f-- farm and ah -my grandfather, who was very strict with them. And that's all he did is pray and read the bible - never worked (laughs).

LEVINE: I bet his wife did though. I mean just taking ---

INGBER: His wife took care of that - even in this country she did all this. My grandfather, when we came to America, he -- he was also brought over later but he had nowhere to go. And he - my mo-- . We had - we lived in Borough Park, Brooklyn and he -- we had a room for him and he lived with us. But he wouldn't speak to us because we were not religious somehow and he had nothing to say to us. Yea, and he kept his door closed - unbelievable.

LEVINE: Really?

INGBER: He did this for a while until somehow he got up courage. He started to peddle -- peddle lemons in a sack over his shoulder. He went from door to door, he was able to do that and he - he tried to make some money that way. So this country changed him a bit (laughing), not all the way but that way. He didn't want to be a burden and he thought, you

know. We had my uncle living there - my -- two uncles. The uncle died not too long ago, he was a millionaire.

LEVINE: And he lived with your mother and father - your uncle?

INGBER: Yea, but that's at the beginning. He had a kind of bui- he got government contracts for the war, World War I ---

LEVINE: What kind of contracts?

INGBER: Ah - he made all kind of, ah - what the hell do you call that? For the government -- different things made of iron, different products which were very much in demand for the war - for the war effort. And he got to be very wealthy. I used to see him but he liked me. He told me he was going to put me through college (laughing) - never happened.

LEVINE: (Laughing)

INGBER: His wife was very jealous type. I used to visit him when he - they lived in Florida here and I wasn't too welcome. Her daughter made sure she wasn't around when I came. We'd be downstairs -- in the restaurant or where and I left. I understand she ca-- (laughs), they couldn't - they couldn't see me getting -- . My uncle liked me and they - they were somehow jealous or what.

LEVINE: Yea.

INGBER: It was miserable so I stopped going, yes.

LEVINE: So why don't you say -- they left Austria - your mother and father left because it was just too hard of a life,. But why did they go to Germany, do you know?

INGBER: Well they - he had an offer possibly, I don't remember that. He thought he could do better in Germany. He didn't realize that there was also anti-Semitism in those years and he wasn't allowed to go to that areas where Jews were not allowed. In 1910 or so. Yeah, mind you, in those years - started to grow.

LEVINE: Now was he peddling, is that what he was doing in Germany?

INGBER: Yea, like house to house. He did business -- some but not enough to stay there. 'Cause he was restricted where he could go.

LEVINE: Right, do you know what he was selling?

INGBER: Women's wear, different women's wear and I think also children's wear. So he had a good business going if he could - was allowed to go to different areas. So, the areas he went to, he managed to do business but not enough to stay there. He saw the (laughing) handwriting on the wall and I'm glad he did (laughs).

LEVINE: So he was the one that said he thought the family should go to America.

INGBER: That's right. When we got in touch with our relatives, they really we-- welcomed us. They have a place for us and everything. We lived on the Lower East Side -

LEVINE: Wait, wait. Lets go - lets finish off with Germany. So your father made the arrangements and your mother had the sisters here, is that right? That they were the relatives that you were coming to ----

INGBER: Yes, that's right.

LEVINE: And you all left Germany, do you remember where you left from?

INGBER: Yea, from Hamburg.

LEVINE: Do you remember that part, going to the port?

INGBER: Yes, I remember going to the ship from - I was on the ship in steerage, way, way at the bottom.

LEVINE: What ship, do you know?

INGBER: I had it on the -

LEVINE: Oh, the manifest - you have.

INGBER: Yea, yea, I'll see --- I'll pick.

LEVINE: Yea, we'll get it later. So you remember going to Hamburg, where you excited? How did you feel?

INGBER: At that age - no I didn't ---

LEVINE: You didn't know really, you were too little.

INGBER: I know my older brothers went to school - they called it - I forgot what they called the school there (laughing).

LEVINE: In Germany, you mean.

INGBER: Yea.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

INGBER: Yossel.

LEVINE: Yossel and what kind of a man was he? How would you describe him?

INGBER: Well he - he was average height and he was very strong. My uncle put him to work. He worked there for a while and he worked hard.

But he wouldn't work (he was religious) he wouldn't work on Saturday and he had to leave. He wouldn't work on Saturday, unbelievable. And, later on, when that influenza hit, he was a victim. He was only in his forties and --

LEVINE: And he died of it?

INGBER: Yup.

LEVINE: In -in this country?

INGBER: Yea, in the Lower East Side. I remember that -

LEVINE: I want to ask you about that influenza. Were a lot of people - did you know that - did you know a lot of people who had it, at that time?

INGBER: Well, it was in the newspaper, that's all we knew.

LEVINE: Yea.

INGBER: we -- Next door to us a Polish family lived and we used the same bathroom, you know. We had a little - a little regele [bolt latch] (laughing) -- close it. There was no such thing as toilet paper, it was newspaper (laughing). And we got along with them and ---

LEVINE: So your father was the only one in the family who got the influenza?

INGBER: Yea.

LEVINE: Wow, and how about your neighbors? Did you know other people -?

INGBER: No.

LEVINE: Wow. Yea because that was of course all over the world.

INGBER: That's right, worldwide. Yeah.

LEVINE: Ok, well, I'm skipping around here - your father, so he was the one who decided and you got here and you were on - we'll get the name of the ship, but what happened? What was your experience on the ship?

INGBER: In the ship? Yea, we had bunks and I don't know - my mother wasn't capable of being on the upper bunk, so she slept on the lower bunk. And all of a su- I remember falling down - yea.

LEVINE: Out of the top bunk?

INGBER: That's right, I was very - they didn't think of something to keep me there (laughs). I was tossing around I guess and they took care of me there. I got over it somehow (laughing). I -- I bounced I guess.

LEVINE: (laughing) Did they have like a doctor on the ship?

INGBER: Yea, I imagine, yes, yes - but the idea is that the food was not good. The ones on the upper deck had the best food and they would look down on us. They'd throw us oranges and little tidbits and we were always ready there (laughing). It was a terrible trip too, a couple of weeks.

LEVINE: By the time you got to New York, do you remember coming into the New York harbor?

INGBER: I sort of, sort of - because I was worried maybe that we wouldn't be admitted - some kind of ailment. Because my mother and father spoke about that. The most - the most horrible thing could happen. They were very strict and admit-- admitting people with a certain kind of sickness or disease. So luckily we just went through (laughs).

LEVINE: You went right through?

INGBER: Yea and eh -

LEVINE: Yea, well lets see, so what was your mother's name?

INGBER: Genendel, (laughing)

LEVINE: How do you spell that? Genendel.

INGBER: G-E-N-D, Genendel- G-E-N-D I have it on that list.

LEVINE: Oh, ok, good, we'll get that too. And - and what was her maiden name, do you know? Was that her maiden name?

INGBER: No. That was her married --

LEVINE: No, that was her first name.

INGBER: Yea, Yea - her first name. Her married name - her single name was Lucks - L-U-C-K-S.

LEVINE: Oh.

INGBER: And over here they called her Anna, instead of Genendel.  
(Both laughing)

LEVINE: So what was her personality like, your mother?

INGBER: Oh, she was great. She was the iron hand.

LEVINE: Was she strict with you children?

INGBER: I - that's right - I was the helper. The others somehow got away with it and sold newspaper and stuff. But before I got a job when I was about twelve, I used to wash the floor and do everything for her.

(Big laugh) My sister was four years younger and anyway she was kind of sickly - all she would eat was chocolate. (Both laughing) And when she was growing up, went to school; she got a job in Barricini -

LEVINE: Oh my goodness.

INGBER: (Laughing) She ate so much chocolate, she got sick every now and then. (more laughing) Yea, yea, she loved chocolate. And now I don't even eat it today. I could never gnaw chocolate.

LEVINE: So were you closest to any one of your moth - of your brothers or your sister?

INGBER: Yes, yes, my older brother always palled around with me later on. He had his friends and we used to go out. He married an English girl - Jewish-English girl. And eh - hard luck hit him too. He was very good, he was in school, he did athletics and everything and all of a sudden he developed rheumatic fever. They had no penicillin in those days and he was married already and he only lasted - also about in the forties. He died - I have a big picture of him in my room - he was the handsomest one (Laughing). I was better looking then. I used to fight a lot and he used to hit me in the nose and I used to tear their clothes and wrestle with them, (laughing) but they're all bigger than me. So that's what happened to me.

But in my wedding picture, that's the way I looked for many years 'til I got -- aggressive there. I wouldn't let anybody get away with anything. They made me a monitor by influence. I was very friendly with one of the - the students and this student was very well off. And the teacher - it was a man teacher - he was selling insurance. And this youngster got his parents to take a lot of insurance from him. So he was a favorite of the teacher. So when the teacher made him a monitor - he said I want -- not Irving, (laughing) not Azik either - I forgot the name.

LEVINE: Isadore?

INGBER: (laughing)

LEVINE: Isadore was it? Was it Isadore? No --

INGBER: Could have been. So he says, "Him," he says, "he's too small - they wouldn't listen to him." "No, you've got to make him a monitor." So he was - made me monitor. So when they -- you blow a whistle, they are supposed to stand still and all of a sudden I see a couple of guys moving. You know, they want to get there first or whatever and I run over to them. You know I say, "Stop" I whistle. They wouldn't believe I was a monitor. They - they said, "Come on now, you're not a monitor. We aren't listening to you." And we start a rumpus (the - the principal was involved (laughing) and I lost my job. (Both laughing)

LEVINE: So what made you so aggressive do you think?

INGBER: Well, I was that way all the time. I couldn't take criticism or anything. And I got away with it a lot until I challenged -. When I got the job and I was about twelve years old - I pushed a pushcart across the Williamsburg Bridge --

LEVINE: Oh my gosh.

INGBER: -- with children's furniture. And nobody knew how I did that but it was - it was very - very lucrative. I made movin' - than my two brothers because I used to get tips from newly weds that lived in Williamsburg. I once got a dollar -- I almost hit the ceiling, you know. A dollar in those days, my God, but mostly it was fifty cents. I put up the crib for them and stuff like that.

LEVINE: So you must have been very strong -

INGBER: I was -

LEVINE: ... to be able to do that, yea.

INGBER: Do you remember, I told -

LEVINE: Oh, you still have muscles, I see (laughing). I have to take your picture showing your muscles.

INGBER: I showed it to the doctor there, he called in the nurse. He said, "Look (laughing) look what this Irving looks like.

LEVINE: That's cute. Well so -

INGBER: I got a special attention that way (laughing).

LEVINE: Yea, yea, you did. Well, lets see - let me go back to when you first got here - you got to Ellis Island, do you have any memory of that?

INGBER: Well not in Ellis Island. When -- when we were out of there, I got to know things mo-- but not at -

LEVINE: -- at Ellis Island. Do you know - like did somebody pick you up? Do you know how you got to the Lower East Side?

INGBER: My relatives - you know, I'm s--. I wasn't -- I was thinking I was four years old (laughing) in Ellis Island. I was --I was more than that. I was ten I think, ten or eleven.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

INGBER: Ten or eleven - you put it down.

LEVINE: Well, we are saying that you came in 1910 or '11 but that you were four years old. But when we look at your manifest, we'll find out for sure because that will have it. So did your aunt, did your uncle, did they pick you up?

INGBER: They picked us up. They got us that apartment in -- on Essex Street -- 150 Essex Street. Things I remember way back and I -- five minutes later or now - (laughing).

LEVINE: Well good - we are interested in way back, so that's good.  
(Both laughing)

INGBER: But not quite everything so ----

LEVINE: Ok so - so, when you got to Esse - when you got to this country, you had already - your family had an apartment ready for you?

INGBER: Yea, yea, they found us an apart-- and that's the place where I worked in the house. There was no bathtub, there was no hot water until they put on something there outside. I don't know. It was very hard. We lived in the top floor and the skylight was there, it used to leak all the time. And we had pots and pans and that's the time my mother took that janitor job. The building next to us was four or five stories and the one we lived in was three stories. So she did both and I guess that's when we paid no rent or very little rent. So that was a big help.

LEVINE: Did you help her?

INGBER: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you help her and her janitorial duties?

INGBER: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you help your mother with the other places - cleaning the other places?

INGBER: No, only the apartment.

LEVINE: Only your own house.

INGBER: Ahh, was she a worker, my (gasps). She was like an Amazon. And my father had that job for- I don't remember how long - not too long because he wouldn't work on Saturday. And then the flu hit him - unbelievable - -strong man.

LEVINE: So did he work at anything else between the time ah he couldn't work - he didn't - after he couldn't work on Saturday, was he able to work at all?

INGBER: He was looking for a job and it was very tough. (Laughs) He didn't want to work on Saturday and he didn't care. He was looking around and I forget whether -- if he had anything to do. So that's how it was. They -- religion was paramount to - with them (laughs). And that's the reason that I -- I became an agnostic. When he died, I was about - I was about close to twelve -- I went into the bathroom. I said, "I don't believe in a god, I don't believe in anything. And one of my

uncles, he was in the lighting - he was pretty well off with his brother (Lightolier, they were called) - it's a big electrical supply store. Fancy lamps and stuff like that. I used to go there every week and he'd give me -- I don't remember it- eight to ten dollars to help us out. And when they saw me come in, they ignored me (laughing) - his brothers. I felt like, you know, a 'schnorrer' [freeloader] or something (laughing).

LEVINE: Why did they ---

INGBER: I was the only one who would do it. I went there, we needed the extra few bucks.

LEVINE: And why did they ignore you then?

INGBER: I don't know. Didn't look at me as. I had to hang around for so long before the paid attention. His name was Anchel. He was a nice guy in his way because later on he used to invite - he lived on Bedford Avenue. They had a house there; it's a high-class neighborhood then. And one time, you know, I-- I started talking to him about books and religion. "I got something for you." He was a real atheist. He had books all about -- against athe - against religion. I don't know if you ever heard of this. I knew his name. In fact this guy, he was buried in Gramercy Park. I used to go to work and everyday I'd walk, winter and summer, from Second Street to Madison Avenue and Twenty-Eighth Street. I had a job then in a ribbon house, a very big one. And I used to walk to work and when they - he got for - oh, Ingersoll, Robert Ingersoll - I bet you never heard of him.

LEVINE: And what was his ----

INGBER: He was -- he was an out-spoken man - oh, a real atheist. His father was a minister (laughs). And he used to - people from all over the world used to come to his ah - when he had meetings, he had reporters from all over. Some were very religious - he used to answer them and he made them look foolish. He was sooo well read (laughs) and about religion that he can - at a drop of hat he could refute things and they were spellbound. Whether he's --. In fact when I was -- when I was living here yet, I went to a library and they dug up a book - Robert G. Ingersoll - and I read it again and I was spellbound. And to this day, I started be an atheist and now (laughing) I became agnostic. I don't know no--

LEVINE: Yea, well so I guess because religion with your grandfather was super religious, right? And your father and I guess you rebelled against that.

INGBER: That's right, I rebelled. In fact, my mother get a -- he's not a rabbi, he teaches Jewish - and the alphabet and religion and all. So the three of us - the rabbi came - I think he got a dollar every time for the three of us. My brothers listened to him and all and I couldn't listen. I said to him, he looked at me, he says, he noticed the way I responded to him and so forth. He says to my mother, "Don't let him come. Er hot a tseylem in-- in's-harz. [he has a cross in his heart]" (Laughing loudly) A tseylem!!

LEVINE: What- what did he say? Say it in English.

INGBER: A tseylem. It mean like Christ or something. (Laughing) A tseylem. He says, "You're wasting your m-- (laughing) you-you-your money.."

LEVINE: So he didn't want you to come?

INGBER: No. (still laughing)

LEVINE: So you said earlier that your grandfather came over to this country, when did he show up?

INGBER: Oh, many years later.

LEVINE: Was your father alive?

INGBER: Ye - well let me see...I don't think so, no. Because I remember I had an uncle -- my sister was married to him. He was a bootlegger, too. One time he asked me to go with him, he needed help. So I did - I did. And he was riding along and all of a sudden a police car (laughs) pulls over. He said, "You have something wrong to your back, it's very low." So he mentioned what he does for a living. Not a bootlegger -- that's when Prohibition was there. And he got away with it, you know. He hit the right guy. And I look in the back (laughing). Well, he delivered liquor all over. He made a good living then. (laughing).

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE B,

TAPE 1

LEVINE: What else do you remember about Prohibition?

INGBER: Well, none of us drank but my brother-in-law drank - he was a drinker, he used to --. And then he brought a partnership in Williamsburg, a saloon, with a partner. They both would steal so the business wasn't bad (laughing). They sold it to somebody -- they were there about a year or two. And they were doing all right but they used to drink and the (laughs) proceeds were bad so he sold the saloon. And this - I remember he said he went back to see something there, in this place and these guys were doing very good (laughing). They ruined their business. My brother-in-law drank and his partner - they didn't trust each other (laughing). Oh, it was terrible.

LEVINE: So - so do you remember the Depression? When you first came here it was probably a little better and then the Depression hit.

INGBER: That's right.

LEVINE: How did it affect your family, the Depression?

INGBER: Well (laughs), we had a Depression from the day we came here (laughs). Yea.

LEVINE: Ok.

INGBER: And we had to depend on my uncle, oh, it was terrible. They made me wait for hours - give me the do-- whatever he did. And the store was on lower Broadway but the side streets were all Italians. So we used to - as kids you used to fight - not in that area. But we lived on Essex Street -- we'd have fights with the Italians. They lived on the other side of the Bowery and we lived on the other side. Each side would never dare to come on - we had stones and throw it and very aggressive. They kept out of our and we kept out of their - we didn't want any part of them (laughs).

LEVINE: You didn't go to school with them?

INGBER: No, we went PS 160 and all Jewish kids did. And one time I was talking - we had an examina - an exam - and the guy in back of me was a dumbbell, he kept asking me questions. I said to him, "We not allowed." You know. And this teacher was reading a paper and you was -- you know, looking to see nobody there gives answers throu--they exchangein' knowledge and stuff. And all of a sudden, he throws on the paper .(You know, when your head-hits -- handball - those little black balls.--they're hard balls) from his desk to the -- almost to the end of the school. To hit me right in the eye. I had a black eye and I was ashamed to tell my mother what happened. I said, "I was fighting." And boy was I - and then from then on he was so nice to me, this teacher. Boy if it happened today (laughs). Or any time. So I didn't lie to my mother. I said, "You know I get into fights." ( laughs).

LEVINE: So in other words he - he saw you talking?

INGBER: Right. I turned around and I said, "Don't bother me." He's - I didn't ask -- answer any questions but he thought I was giving him answers (laughing). Lipshitz his name was. Boy, he was a character. And there was one guy in our class that was tall as him and you wouldn't take any crap from him. And he went up front and he - this guy is gonna do-. As Lipshitz says, "You're going to report him to this and that". He says, "If you do, I'll knock the hell out of you (or something) - the shit out of you." And the guy couldn't believe and this powerful guy. And he thought for a while and they was - they started wrestlin'. And the windows were almost on the bottom of the floor in that school. Wait, I thought they were gonna --. We were hollerin' they going to go out of the window. And that's what happened. He didn't even report this guy, he was afraid of him ( laughing). He was a - he was a mixed. Like a - I don't know if he was a Cuban or what but he wa-- that's one that wasn't Jewish and he didn't take anything from him. Boy he was - nobody dare to talk to this teacher but he -(laughing) he fough--he wrestled with him.

LEVINE: So when did you take up wrestling?

INGBER: Well I was - I had a job down in that Dribenhaus [ph] and it was a nice job - in fact - yea, I got a job - I forgot about this. On Fourth Avenue, the man that ran that business was a German and he was

strict. I used to take a little wagon - push. He used to deliver gray goods - I don't know what you -- if you know what that is.

LEVINE: No.

INGBER: Raw goods to these big, big houses and they would make, you know, dye it and do everything. They get it very cheap that way. This guy had connections in Germany or where ever and he got all the gray goods from a mill and he kept - he kept shi- me ship - me - by myself. Then I - I got up courage I say, "Mr. Slinger, you know it's too much for me." "Alright, get a helper" (laughing) He - he was (laughing) surprised that I talked to him. And when - I delivered one time a couple pieces of gray with big bolts and this kid was with me - my helper. We delivered the goods and this guy who was the boss comes over. He says, "What's this?" I say, "It's Slinger - that's - you always get this shipment." "I don't want it." I say, "Can I call up my boss." He says, "No, no calls." And he got so nasty. I said, "What do you mean no calls?" My boss said I got to call if anything ever happens. You know, if they - if anybody refuses shipment, give me a call. So he wanted to talk - the people ---. He said, "You can't talk!" I says, "Why not?"

He que-- I questioned and all of a sudden he starts to push me (laughs). I give him a shove and he falls down and with the glasses - he breaks the glasses. And he howls, "Murder, murder!" (laughs) And he had - he had a relative was a fighter there, a guy was twice my size. He runs over. I say, "What the hell is this?" He says, "What did you do to my - eh - whatever he was." I said, "He wouldn't let me use the phone." He said, "That's his place, he can do it." I had my orders. (Laughing) I ran to the elevator with this kid. The kid ran down the stairs and I had the goods there - he got frightened. This guy came and he started to throw punches at me. But I - you know I fought back but this guy was too big for me. And the people come running, the workers, What, what are you doing? He'll kill you" (laughing) I was so small. And he hit me a few times and I didn't know what time - I didn't know - I was scared too. I was waiting for the damn (laughing) elevator but he got in a few punches before I got on ---

LEVINE: So what did you do? You left your goods and just went back to your office?

INGBER: No. I had that little truck like. And I got into the elevator and I came back. And Slinger said, "What's wrong, why didn't you call me?" And I said, "We had a fight - you see the way I look." (laughs) He says, "You shouldn't have done that." (Laughs) I said, "You told me to use the phone and I went right by the book."

LEVINE: So that's how you first started fighting?

INGBER: Well, wrestling more or less, yea, yea. I did a lot of it in Lexington and Ninety-Second Street. Y.M.C.A, it was, not H-A. I did a lot of it up there, it felt very good. After work I used to go there --- yea.

LEVINE: So did you have like actual matches?

INGBER: Oh yea, yea, yea. The first one I lost he was twice my weight. I don't know why they - they teamed me up --

LEVINE: I thought you only wrestled with people who were around your -

INGBER: -- your weight. No, they wanted to try me out, you know. The big guys needed to get more agile and wrest - you know. Because they stand still instead of run - moving around. And then they had me (laughs) tra - train these guys to be faster on their feet [laughing]. Ohhhh, it's funny, yea.

LEVINE: So when you look back on that wrestling time, how do you think about it now?

INGBER: Oh, I feel good about it because it kept me in shape -

LEVINE: Yea.

INGBER: Yea, then I'd walked downtown. We lived on - oh, the Elevateds ran upstairs and we were right under the Elevated [laughs]. Nothing kept me from sleeping. Nothing like this - now I got to take sleep - Ambien, sleeping pill helps a little.

LEVINE: You mean, when you said the elevated - like the elevated trains, is that what you mean?

INGBER: The El. There First Avenue El, there was a Third Avenue El. They made such a racket [laughing], I don't know how we ever stayed there. The rent was cheap. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh huh. So, did you start school when you first came to this country?

INGBER: I waited a little while. And when I did, I mean, little by little I knew some English -- until I went to school. Then it started to come easier but - also I had a lot of problem. They called me a greenhorn and other things. I couldn't talk much, yea. And I think I told you how you followed what they did and went outside they didn't go to the bathroom [laughs] on the street - [laughing] --[not understood] on the street.

LEVINE: Hmm.

INGBER: Unbelievable. And there was a man that used to come around with a pushcart with spoiled candy [laughs]. When I didn't go home for a bite, which wasn't much, I used to grab anything - because I liked to play handball in the back of the school. I was pretty good, I could hit with either hand. So, I loved to play handball. So, I used to run out, I didn't want to go home and he had all kinds of candies. Even chocolates - I didn't care what it was. For a penny or two, I'm telling ya, I didn't eat lunch. Spoiled candy! I didn't get sick - -

LEVINE: [laughing]

INGBER: (laughing) Oh, it's something.

LEVINE: So - go ahead.

INGBER: And then when, you know, I joined - I was with a gang and we - we made a lot of noise in the backyards - they call a shed. It's a way above ground. On one side it was about fifteen-twenty feet to the ground and the other side was maybe four-five feet. So we used to hang around and chase each other across a fence. The fence was about this wide. If you ever lost your balance - you go down, you can get killed. So we made so much noise chasing each other - tag. And we jumped from a shed also to a barred window about ten feet away and grabbed - as we jumped, we grabbed [laughs] the - the bars and we fight and holler.

All of a sudden we see a stranger, a guy dressed up. Everybody's like, what's this guy doing here? He says, "Look fellows - - I want you out of here and I don't want to see you anymore. Everybody is complaining about you. Don't come here anymore." Well [laughing] who's he? We taunted him. I say, "Is that right? Catch us!" He says, "You'll be sorry." (laughs) And I see all of a sudden he's running along -- that fence. I say, "How the hell did he --?" [laughing]. He says - He says, "What're you a funny guy or what?" He caught me, of all people. I say, "What are you? - Are you with the police?: "That's right," he says, "I don't want to get tough with you. I see you like to do this, but it's not the place. You're disturbing the whole area here in the back." I said, "Ok, ok." I was - (Both laugh). And later on, when we dar- when we played tag on the roofs. You know my - where we lived it was a three story. Next building was a four or five story - I don't know - a walk-up and we used to take chances. We'd take a running jump between - the two building was at least six feet.

LEVINE: Oh, my gosh.

INGBER: And with that - with a lot of running you know and we got across the other side. We used to practice it. If you ever slipped, you would die there. And then my mother found out [laughing], and we took such chances those days, my God. And we had one guy that come from Europe - we called him the Varshaver, he came from Warsaw. So he barely spoke English, just a little. He wanted to join us. We didn't want him because he - he had nothing to show - you know, he's a foreigner. But he hung around, hung around, he got a little toughened up. And all of a sudden, he used to also hang around - we also -- at the poolroom.

There - it was owned by a couple of [laughs] eh, gangsters and we used play a little pool. So he hung around there all the time. He got in with these guys. And -and he hung around a year or two, I don't remember. He was so anxious to work for them because they, you know, paid well. So he joined them and they send him to Chicago to settle something. He never came back [laughing]. He was stupid that way, you know. He took a chance to go try to settle something that these son-of-a-bitches - they didn't care. They sent him there -- "We want to see

how you do." [laughing] He didn't settle anything [laughs]. But they killed him somehow and he never came back.

LEVINE: Wow, so you said you called him vasha?

INGBER: Varshaver..

LEVINE: What - what does that mean?

INGBER: In Jewish it's Varshaver - it's Warsaw.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

INGBER: Warsaw [laughs]

LEVINE: Wow. Well you were a tough guy then, huh?

INGBER: Oh yeah, that's right. If they were too big for me or heavy, I would tear their clothes. I managed to be so fast; they never came near me again. Because when they went home [laughing] they got ho-- holy hell. They --torn - torn shirts and pants. I once fought with a guy who was twice my size and his father was a known gangster. I knew he was a gangster. He - he - in Houston Street, there was a mob - a lot of gangsters there that time. And somehow I got into an argument with him. He - so I says - he says, "Anything goes."

I said, "I can wrestle then?" He says, "No, no - no wrestling," he said, "you got to fight." I said, "What, come on, you taking advantage". I said, "Look at the size of you and reach. I can't fight you, I'll wre - we'll wrestle." He wouldn't wrestle. I don't know what prompted me. I ran close and I hit him in the belly with my head and he started holler and he wanted to go after me and then he see his father looking out the window [laughs]. The gangster. [Both laughing]

I said, "He brought it on there - I forgot his name. In fact, when we lived on Essex Street -- we lived on the third floor, I used to say -- look out the window at night and I see him walking, this father. And he was near a furniture store with the glass windows and all and all of a sudden a shot rings out. They tr- they missed him though. They - they made a mess of the furniture window [laughs] and boy, I tell you, I never saw anything like that again. A live gun, shooting [laughing] and he got away with it. Sometimes - he ducked and he ran. That was the first time I [laughs] ever saw anything like that.

LEVINE: Was there much crime around in the neighborhood, in the lower east side, in those days?

INGBER: Well, we didn't get along with most of the Polla - Pollacks. We had a neighbor we were very friendly with but they'd go through the streets sometimes - a lot of Pollacks and we'd have fights. And one time, some guy, I don't know what happened. He kept taunting me, I'm small or this and that - he'll knock hell out of me. I made a dash near a cellar and I butted him and he went - he fell down the stairs. Oh, I

don't know if I killed him, we started to run. They never came in the area again [laughing].

LEVINE: Oh.

INGBER: I don't know what happened then. Yeah, we fought all the time, yea, yea.

LEVINE: Now how about schoolwork? Was that something you were interested in or not?

INGBER: Well I would do it all right, yea naturally, yea. But eh - I wasn't too interested. My uncle, I think I told you, was going to put - put me through college. But I know damn well his family want no part of it [laughing]. They didn't even want to see him spend money on me. Unbelievable, the guy was loaded. He had a terrible daughter - such a snob. She - she moved much later here. She got married to some guy; I don't know what he did. And she - they built a house in Boca Raton. And when my uncle once had a birthday, she -she come around, thank everybody at a big table, ignore me and my wife. I couldn't stand that there. I didn't want to make a rumpus.

But we left early. I said to her, "You're a nothing!" I said. What the hell? I forgot what I called her. I said -- what the hell did I call her then? Boy, she walked away fast. I told her to her face and much later my - my sister and her husband were friendly somehow with my uncle and she was friendly with them. And one time - somebody - I don't know if it was her or her mother called up, says, "Your uncle died." And it wasn't so. They didn't hear right [laughing]. What happened to -- they brought somethin' - a cake and all And we - and we come up, you know. And my sister and brother-in-law and somebody else. We look. Where's Shloime? What? Didn't you know he died? Oy yay yoy [laughing] Oy, you missed [laughing] - - well, we wouldn't be - embarrassed. "Sam," I said, "I'm glad you didn't die, Sam." [Both laugh]

LEVINE: So was your first job in the ribbon factory? Was that your first job?

INGBER: No, I just remember now. No, I was still too young but I got a job after school. I don't think -- I was about fourteen or less - in a mercantile store on lower Broadway. Not - almost near where my uncle had his business. And I got a job there working on stock and all that, it was hard work. And they used to have ladders they go all the way up. And I was putting stock there and some jerk tripped. He came near the ladder - I fell off the ladder. Oh boy, I couldn't believe what happened. They came running from all directions. This guy stumbled and he went against the ladder. Oy, what a job that --. I worked in a sub-basement packing cases with a hammer, you know. We'd go out of turn. Oy, that was some job. And then we - instead of let me get off at the usual time, they had a few errands for me to run. I - I have to deliver in different areas there. At least two or three and they wouldn't let me go home right away. They made me deliver eh - eh some goods or whatever. That was a tough job, long hours.

LEVINE: So is that why you left it? Did you get something - -?

INGBER: I left that job, yea, yea. I couldn't take it there. Yea and then there was various jobs. I don't remember now.

LEVINE: And then you had the ribbon factory - -

INGBER: It's a tremendous -- they had the whole building, ribbons and some piece goods, you know. That's how I got the piece good job on - - with the German, you know. I showed my work for -

LEVINE: You mean with the gray goods?

INGBER: Gray goods, yea, yea. We used to deliver a lot of stuff there. And then I worked for a piece goods hou- no, for a big store. A piece goods, that's right. I used to work part time. They need someone to measure and pick out orders. I had - they had all types of piece goods and that gave me the start with piece goods there. And gave me the start to open that store because, you know, I had a lot of piece goods. I used to go around with dress - to dress houses. My brother then opened his own dress factory. He was very aggressive, he's a little guy like me and he did a nice business.

Everybody liked him - he used to go around to the buying offices. There everybody knew little Sammy, they loved him. So he - he worked for a dress house that specializes in velvets. And everybody, you know, that used velvets - it's a big item. And he did a nice business and they took him in as a partner later on. And then - and the funny part of it is --. I-- I was just then out of a job and I used to stand in front of the building with a lot of other fellows. And when buyers come back -- or people that owned factories -- they need somebody, you know. We hang there by the hour - nothing doing. When I told them I was piece goods. And eh, oh yeah.

And then my oldest brother was a dress salesman and he was very good too. He made a nice appearance and eh, - all of a sudden he looked around and then he found through the industry, one tells the other, a new dress house is going into business, Dolly Dot [laughs]. So now he made a dash - oh, I worked for my uncle. I think I told you this. I worked for my uncle, he gave me twelve dollars a week. And there - they were all Pollacks and this [not understood] - right at the waterfront there - its cold. The machines working and my hands - my hands got full of milk like - milk-like substance because you had to put those irons into machines to make something of it.

So, he calls me. He says, "Look, get out of there." he says. I says, "Oh, yeah." I changed clothes (when I came there I had better clothes) and eh - so, and I had over- or other -- some kind of pants and shirt - dirty looking stuff, ---- I threw the stuff then. I say -- change my clothes and I'm -- as I'm running out I say, "Oh Molly, I got a chance for a very good job here." "But you can't leave in the middle of the time". "I can't?" I said, "I'm doing it." [laughs] She was a mope. So I got up there, they needed a shipping clerk. And I told them

I know piece goods and I can pack and ship and do everything. [not understood] Boy was I happy then. It was the time during the depression, alright.. Plus I used to walk the building from floor to floor --1400 Broadway. That's a high class building. I'd run -- walk from floor to floor.

Yes, cause my firm went out of business then when eh - I was there a few years. They even sent me out with a model once. Just to see - to go see J.C. Penny. Oh, I said, "Boy oh boy, that's a job." So this girl was very attractive [laughing] and I made a nice appearance then. I went up to J.C. Penny. I asked for the buyer, there was a few salesmen there. Finally he called me in. I knew the one number that was a knockout and sure enough she looks at it, she says, "How about this dress?" She says, "If I give you an order, I want everything -- it'll be marked down just like the sample. Because [laughing] sometimes they show a sample - and they ma- ornaments are different [not understood]. So I said, "Well, we're anxious to do business, you'll get what you want." "Make sure now." So I come back to tell the boss, "You know what kind of an order they gave me? One size, a size sixteen. About two thousand dresses." They had so many stores, J.C. Penny then. "Oy," my boss says, "What'd you do? You're gonna put me out of business [laughing]." I said, "Look, you going to pass up an order like this? I said, "You make the exact sample and you have no problem." Oy, he spoke to his partner, he went into conference and everything. They finally decided to do it [laughs]. I went up to the girl. She wore the dress she's getting. Well, she looks like with a - with a - [laughing] he got it out again.

LEVINE: A magnifying glass?

INGBER: [laughing] A magnifying glass. Everything had to be just so. Boy, that [(laughs) [not understood] out of business immediately. Oh boy was I happy with a nice order like this. I got a little commission, not a full one [laughs] And they hi - they hi - they hired a big guy to be my help - helper as a shipping guy part time. So he did most of the shipping after. I went out each morning to the buying office, I became a big shot.

LEVINE: Wow, ok, but we're at the end of this tape and I'd like to put in another tape and we'll keep going.

INGBER: Yea, Yea

LEVINE: Great, this is wonderful. Ok -

INGBER: It's a quarter to eleven now.

LEVINE: Really? Ok, this is the end of tape 1

END SIDE B, TAPE 1 BEGIN SIDE A,  
TAPE 2

LEVINE: Ok, this is the beginning of tape two and I'm talking with Irving Ingber and we were talking about when you got that great big

order, the size sixteen from J.C. Penny. So was that then the beginning of your moving - sort of up in the - in the world.

INGBER: Yea, I started to do all right but it still -- it was still during the depression time. Anyway, oh yeah, I wanted to tell you how I met my wife.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

INGBER: Yea, it was a basket - basketball game and dance. My future wife was with - with her sister and they were already going to a movie across the street on Bay Parkway when all of a sudden they see a couple of men with instruments. My wife was a good dancer and she was dying to - she says, forget the who, we're going to see [laughs]. And as fate would have it, they sat right above us in the aisle in the gymnasium there. And you know, I was fooling - I was with my two friends who were fooling around on the game with a quarter or nickel [laughs] or a dime. And they were listening there, and she says, my wife says [laughing], "Boy - you guys are big spenders." [laughs] And I say, "Irving, you hadn't done any -- anything yet." And I was, I had a chocolate bar. So I turned around and said, 'Here, have -- have this chocolate bar.' "Oh, thank you." [laughs]

And we start talking and she got so friendly and nice and eh --. when my - my friends loo-- kept looking and what's going on here? So, when the music starts - I was no [laughing] da-- dancer. I said, "Look," I figure I'm taking a chance, "come." [laughing] We went on the floor, I have two left feet [laughing]. She says, "I thought you were a dancer." I says, "All right, as long as you're here, just follow me " And she[laughing] run. It was - felt so awkward. When we got through she says, "Well, why'd you tell me you could dance?" I said, "I wanted to know you better [laughs]." She says, "That's nice." And she kept kibitzin' there, through the game - through the game. And then when she was ready to go home I said, "Do you live around here?" She said, "Yeah, it's within -" She lived in Bensonhurst and I lived in Borough Park ,It wasn't too close. So I said, "I'll walk you home."

And I said, "My friend - take your sister". The friend didn't want the sister. [laughs] he wasn't too eh - . She had a little nose that was broken [laughs]. So I, "Look, you've got to help me out." So he goes along with me and we were by ourselves there - we're talking - I say, "How would you like to ice skate?" I was pretty good at that time, you know. I went with a friend - we hit every ice skating rink. We even went to Madison Square Garden and I - I said - she said, "I -- I think I have weak ankles." And tried to get out. I say, "You'll love it. You'll rent skates and as you'll learn, I'll get you a pair of skates." And her sister looks at her, sh- says, "That sounds interesting." laughs]. So, next time I saw her, I took it - I ran right over to Madison Square Garden and [not understood] did I have a sore arm. She hung out - hungin-hung for dear life. Almost pulled me down [laughing] a couple of times but I kept at it. I say, "I got to know her better." She was pretty and very friendly and ---yea. And then we went to Brooklyn on Bedford Avenue there's a skating rink, nearer, and went in a few different ones, I forgot. And she started improve. In fact I have

a picture of her and me ska - she's skating with me like-- like a train did. then, that's what I did.

LEVINE: Yea.

INGBER: And if you wait a minute I'd like to show you that picture.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

INGBER: ...very nice.

LEVINE: So, then did you keep - you kept seeing her?

INGBER: Oh, sure, sure. She invited me to her house. Her father had a restaurant on the east side, a luncheonette. And I was introduced to him and he was a very bright man. He knew all about religion, against religion [laughing] - down my alley. And we got very friendly and then I made a date to see her - they invited me for dinner. She had how many sisters? Char - or Charlotte, Miriam and - she had four sisters and one brother. The brother died early, he got some kind of a disease. He was a conductor on the train [laughs]. I used to take that train down to New York. And eh --he was lou-loud. He would stand, you know, in between the trains. If he see some pretty girls, he'd holler to them and [laughs]. I told her what her brother does. She says, "I don't know, he had a good education and my father wanted him to go to school but he's not the type." [not understood] he died early -

LEVINE: So then did you - did you marry soon after you met your wife?

INGBER: Oh, about two years. We weren't in shape then. The -the - when we got married it was in a shul, we couldn't afford anything better. And we had the immediate family there --- and after we were married, my brother was there and his friend (he was called Archie Bell - he was a fighter. He went to England to fight and everything else, he was a good fighter.) So, he's the one -- after the wedding, he took us to the -- a big hotel in Brooklyn. I forgot what its name. Had a big swimming pool.

LEVINE: St. George?

INGBER: St. George - yeah, yeah [laughing] and we had a time there. It was heavy rain all the time. He pick - he picked us up the next day, it was pouring and eh - what happened? Nothing happened the first night [laughs]. But - it wasn't great all the time. Funny - Ha! I was so athletic and did so much stuff. We lived in - we rented in a private house up a floor ----- and I used to sleep outdoors, even the cold weather. I had a heavy quill - I - we call it iberbet [over bed, feather quilt] [laughs] I slept under there and I felt great exercising. It was great, you know, dress for it - very warm. All of a sudden, one morning, I can't get up. I was like stiff. Oh, I was heartbroken - what's going to be with me? Oh, I was in tears.

I called my mother, she couldn't believe it. "Oh my God, what happened?" I figure I was finished. We had a doctor, Dr. Diero on the east side. He used to charge us - when he came to the house, it was

a dollar. If we went to his office it's fifty cents [laughs]. So I got so friendly, he called me the shtarke [the strong man] you know. He liked the way I looked. And he had a son was - he gonna - was goin' to school also as a doc - he was very nice to me. He said, "Look, try hot and cold showers. Go into my -" We didn't have that. He let me use his shower and everything. I did that for about a month, it helped a little but not enough. So, I said to my mother, "Look, Grandma and you go to Sharon Springs every year -". You've heard of Sharon Springs?

LEVINE: No, tell me.

INGBER: Ahhh, that's near - past Albany, its sulphur baths. And miracles of miracles, I was there three weeks. Deep tubs you can stand in and be treated and what else? Oh, and then they give me a rub down and I'll tell you - when I first came there, I couldn't make a little hill. I walked backwards and the old people used to look - yea [laughs] And all of a sudden, yeah, after three weeks, all of a sudden a different person. A miracle happened. I got over it. I never thought I'd get over it because I was in good health then. Maybe it come back like a miracle. Oh, was I - oh, my mother couldn't believe it. In fact, we went to - when we were on our honeymoon, my mother came with us [prolonged laughing]. She had her own room, my wife didn't [not understood] [laughs]. 'Cause she was very understanding, she's very nice. I-I went back for more baths and I went with her, you know, she needed the baths. And it was great. We visited a Hershey factory and that was near there. When you pulled into town, you smelled the sulfur so strong and that's what saved me - sulfur baths. All the old people knew about this place and ---- and then from there, we went to Saratoga Springs. You've heard of them?

LEVINE: I've heard of it.

INGBER: Sure. They have a big racetrack and we took her - the drinking water there, it tasted like sulfur.[both laughing]. And we stayed there about a week and then we left. It was a great time all in all but - I couldn't believe I was myself again - a miracle. I almost got religion again [laughs]. I said, "Time I came an agnostic -" [both laugh]

LEVINE: Wow, so tell me about your work life while we have a little time left.

INGBER: What?

LEVINE: Your work life. So it was during the depression when you sold the order to J.C. Penny and then what did you do after that?

INGBER: Well, we went out of business - yea. There was no job to be had - I told you, I walked the buildings up and down. I took an elevator up and I walked the stairs down and ask 'em if anybody need anything. People were jumping out of windows in their - in the dress line. So, I see I'm not getting anywheres. I went ahead and get - I got myself a - a second-hand car and I went around picking up laundry. First I went to some relatives. [laughs] They mentioned to other people. And I went

from, also, door to door and I got quite a little business there. I'd bring it to the laundry and bring it back to them. And I made a few bucks but not enough there. I did that for a while, I picked up laundry.

LEVINE: Were you married by then?

INGBER: Yeah, and we had a one room on Bay Parkway but it was a big room. And we had a kitchen, you know, behind the curtain there and all that. We started that room and my mother moved - at - mo-- had to live - moved. Moved! .Lived around the corner. So I could --she could even talk to me [laughs] and we'd holler. And one time I had a such a bad cough, I - I just coughed so loud - my mother opened the window -- she was a little distance away , she heard me coughing. [both laugh] Anyway, that time, yea. And luckily (I forgot to tell you) my wife had a civil service job and she was there for years. She made twelve dollars a week. Was big money. She worked for the fire department, in the office. So I used to kid her, "How did you get up and down. You use the poles? " [laughs]

So, if not for her, we'd never make it. It was terrible time. Yea, and one time I tried to save money, I bought some cleaning fluid and I had a lot of clothes. I put it in the bath, we had a bath then, and a shower in that room. And I put that in and I started - and there's -- had a small window in the bathroom - I started washing. All of a sudden I felt kind of dizzy. That chemical that they have in there. It was very close. I said, "Bea, le-- I gotta get some air. Hurry up." "What's the matter?" I said that the stuff I used - "Bessie, run up on the roof." She says, "No, come on, come on." So we went up on the roof and I felt so - I walked over to the edge of the roof and she grabbed me. I was like - I thought I could float. What a -- what a terrible thing that was, very close. I felt that I'm - I'm flying, that nothing could happen. I was gonna walk off the roof. Oy. So luckily I'm still here [laughs].

LEVINE: Yea.

INGBER: I never did that again.

LEVINE: So after you - after the depression was over, then did you start to build up?

INGBER: Let me see ---- Oh yes. [laughs] A big-time-I went. I went in with a good friend of mine, that went after me the first time. His name was Sol Whitreal, but he called himself Sol White. He had a good job as a piece goods salesman. And eh, my brother - I had an idea, I'll open up a store -

LEVINE: Just a second, Irv-- [pause] -- Sol White -

INGBER: We were - I said to my brother, I have an idea. Jamaica's a very lively town and it's in the bus terminal. You know - had windows in the front and in the back. I said, "I'd like to go into piece goods store." Shmata [rag] store we called it. Remnants and regular goods, woolens and everything else [laughs] He says, "I think it's a good

idea." He said, "How much do I need?" [laughs]. I said, "Five thousand." Didn't hint - I didn't - "Okay, you've got it." and this guy had money. So, maybe with about ten thousand dollars we started to buy goods. I went around the dress houses. My brother recommended, he knew all the guys in the dress business that has a lot of piece goods that they didn't use. Had stuff laying around and trimmings and stuff like that. I piled up the car on Sun - no, not Sunday, there's nobody there. During the week even 'cause - and then this guy put in his wife with me, to help me. Because he was selling, he was a salesman, he had - he made money. But [Pause] - I get distracted.

LEVINE: So, you were going - you brought all this stuff to the store

-

INGBER: Yea, yea, I'd fill up the car and I go on Canal Street - they had a lot of jobbers there. And even on Broome Street. And I would buy goods from them. 'Cause I had no credit, I have to pay cash. But I had a lot of goods from the dress houses. Boy, did they pile me up. And I started to build up a stock - and from the beginning, business was good. I used to dress the windows. Four windows I had - two in the front was very big windows and in the back, in the terminal was smaller windows. I had one - one time I had a window dresser and I saw the way he worked. And he got too much for us, but he did a nice job. I said, "I could do that." So I want to know if I want an appointment for the next season or what. I says, "No. I think I'll try it myself." He say, "Oh, good luck." [laughs]

I did very good there. I got the signs and I did a very good printing job - almost professional. I didn't need it there but I had most - most of the stuff that looked great, prints. This Sol, he worked for a print house. He got me the slight seconds. I sold those prints, rayon prints, three for a dollar [laughs]. And I made at least fifty percent [laughs]. He was a good source for me. So, we did very good and then if things got a little hectic, I couldn't take his wife. She was like a snob. If the people would ask us twice, "Can you do better?" "Look, lady, that's the price." "Oh my God," I says, "she's ruining the business, Sol." I'm sorry Sol, I can't take her. He was very nice with me. We once spent a vacation in Coney Island, the two of us. We used to run the boardwalk and buy food outside. So we shared a room and that was my vacation - Coney Island. [laughs] We ran the boardwalk, oh yea.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about what Coney Island was like then?

INGBER: Oh, my God. I used to play handball there on the handball courts - Brighton Beach - oh boy did I - I was a regular there. One time, I was so anxious to play, the sn - eh it was -- the snow on the ground. [laughs] I went in with Sol. We shoveled - he had brought a shovel and we shoveled - shoveled the snow away and we played handball. And the thing is this, I did - I did him a dirty trick afterwards. But he wanted it, he became -- . Not him - no, no. It's ju-I get --. My eh, a cousin that was married to a lawyer and we were very friendly, we lived - all lived in Jamaica . So I told him I was running a business and I said we'll have to make out a partner - a partnership and all. He

said, I'll do it for you, for a fee." So I said, "How much?" "Fifty dollars." "Well, look, let me think about it."

As I think about it, I said, "Look, " I forgot his name already, "you play handball, don't you?" "Sure." "What if I give you ten points ahead?" "What, you don't even know how I play and you give me -" "It'll be no fee if I win. [laughs]" "And if I - if you lose?" "I'll pay you and I'll give you extra -" And something like that" [laughs] We went there and this - and this Sol was watching the game and I was taking him over. [Laughs] He couldn't believe it, I played with both hands, I'm so close to - 'Fore I used to hit - eh, what do you call it? When you hit the ball at the end of the fence and you never can return it. - and do you know what I was doing. And I beat him - ha ha - I couldn't believe it and I didn't pay him. Boy, did he look at me. "You took me for a patsy. I gave you a chance," I said. "You jumped at it - ten points." [laughs] So he gave us all the papers and everything else. After that I used to see him at a function or something - "You took a -- "[laughing]. Oh boy -

LEVINE: So then -

INGBER: --And then my wife even - we -- in the summertime - she came down with me every now and then and played a little but she was slow. We couldn't [laughs]-

LEVINE: So then did you stay in that store in Jamaica?

INGBER: Twenty-five years. And from there, the rent was so high already because it's a bus terminal, they -- a big store - [ph] Gerch's department store on Jamaica Avenue and there was an empty store right on the side entrance. When I had - I put my brother-in-law and my sister in the Jamaica store and I opened up that store. I did pretty good for a while until I got competition [laughs] that was across the street. Son of a gun. This guy had ready made stuff and he - I see - it didn't work out. I -I - had a 'going out of business' sale and I did very good with it. And I say, I'm getting away from here. I went in -to - on the way to Lake Ronkonkoma - I forgot the name of -oh, Brentwood. There's a big hospital there for people who are a little off there. And - but I started do good business there too. The train came by, stopped there - there was a stop.

And I started to do good and another store opened up about five, six blocks away. [Laughing] The same kind of a store. And I said, "Look guys." I didn't need so much business there. I did all right for a while and then it petered out. I said, "We're going back." I had a house there - yea, a new house we bought. All young people - I moved among them. It was about, about eight thousand dollars - a brand new house. And -I - I had the money from the sale and I paid cash for it. And we stayed there - we had a finished basement, it was beautiful. And we had three bedrooms upstairs, I forgot what they called that kind of house. And I stayed there a couple of years and then I -

LEVINE: Where was the house?

INGBER: Brentwood.

LEVINE: Oh, Brentwood.

INGBER: Yea, yea. And we made some - met some very nice people. My wife got friendly with this women who had four kids [laughs]. We used to visit each other and bake and stuff - very friendly. But we weren't happy there because all young people there [laughs] and we were out of place there. So, I went back to Queens, near Forest Hills. I rented an apartment there - in a one family house. And I - I went ahead and I got myself - my brother helped me out again. By the way I paid him back every penny there. Oh yea, no. He gave me the rest. I still owed a thousand - he says, "Keep it."

So, I went to - what the hell did I do? I got a taxi cab medallion. I was in my late sixties already and it was twenty-five thousand then. Many, many years ago and I owned a cab which was very - a medallion is very scarce - they weren't given them out. Only to veterans a little here and there. So I got a guy that wasn't well or something and he couldn't keep on driving. I forgot what I paid him. I bought it - then he - he was with a - I bough it - I bought the metall - the medallion but I couldn't get the twenty-five thousand right there. I didn't want to borrow from my brother. So, I paid part. And I was paying him out - yea. And I started to do - I worked nights. I asked my brother in law to -- he drove a cab at night. He used to like to drive drunks [laughs]

LEVINE: [laughs]

INGBER: Oh, he was a character, boy. They hang around saloons and then they come out [laughs]. Oh out and out - terrible. So - what the hell were we? -

LEVINE: So you drove a cab?

INGBER: For six years. I knocked myself out. I didn't walk. When I got home - I worked ten/twelve hours a day. I paid it off. I get the - the - the broker. You know and all - there was money I borrowed - and what the hell did I do again? Oh boy, I cant remember.

LEVINE: So when you - you mean you did something after you drove the cab?

INGBER: Yea.

LEVINE: Wow.

INGBER: Maybe I did that after. I went into business or something. I lost -

LEVINE: You lost your train --. Well you drove the cab for some years -

INGBER: Six years.

LEVINE: And then what did you do, sell the medallion?

INGBER: I sold it for twenty-five too, what I paid. Oh, so I had the money for the store, you see. But, oyy, just ---[pause] Oh, I was gonna tell ya - right now, the taxi cab medallion is selling for - have you any idea?

LEVINE: No.

INGBER: Three hundred thousand.

LEVINE: Wow.

INGBER: Would you believe that? That's how business is in Manhattan. And I went to the airports and knocked myself out. I was in - I was loosing my zest for life then. It was a terrible --. I had fights - they wouldn't pay. I went to Harlem then - when I first started I didn't know any better. I went to Harlem. Oh, I had close fights there. And one guy - he said, "Wait I'll be right back." I said, "Come on, pay up." He didn't answer, he ran up and I see a couple of black guys sitting in the front, you know - it's one of these neighborhoods, you know. So I come - I said, "Your friend didn't pay." "Yeah, he's on this floor, go ahead after him." I said, "Drop dead." And I ran away. [laughs] I think they thought they got a jerk [laughing], they get me in the building -

LEVINE: We'll, --[break]

END SIDE A, TAPE 2

BEGIN SIDE

B, TAPE 2

LEVINE: We're practically - we have to stop soon for lunch but let me just ask you, what are you proudest of? What do you feel satisfied that you did in your long life?

INGBER: My marriage. We were married seventy-four years.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

INGBER: So many the last few years I was hectic. Oh, she was so great to get along with. She'd do anything for me. Ugh, that's what it was.

LEVINE: Yea, well then you took care of her I guess at the end.

INGBER: Oh my. I used to dress her, I used to shower her because I didn't trust these kids there -Ugh -

LEVINE: And she had Alzheimers, is that what she had?

INGBER: She didn't go into Alzhem-- just eh -

LEVINE: Dementia -

INGBER: Dementia - oh, it was terrible. She was in the hospital. The University Hospital -- I was there everyday. And she would holler, "Take me home, take me home."- ahh, and then she ahh- she didn't wa-she didn't want to eat. She wouldn't drink and she wouldn't eat. When I was there myself I forced it to lo - . Don't do this, I'll throw up." She couldn't hold anything down. It was so --. My daughter came down one - . She says, "I don't know how you take this." I say, "She'd -" I'd go crazy." ahh.

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

INGBER: Beatrice.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

INGBER: Ringhel.

LEVINE: R-I-N-

INGBER: G-H-E-L

LEVINE: And your daughter - you have one daughter?

INGBER: Two daughters. Marilyn is a psychotherapist and she's never been married. She's one of those types. She goes - she ice - she goes skiing, she goes all over the world. She does - ugh, she's got so many friends. She left-she lived with one guy and couldn't take him and said no more for her [laughs].

LEVINE: And what about your other daughter?

INGBER: My younger daughter, she married. You know she was very shy. She went to one of those places where you meet people and she met this guy - he was a electrical engineer. He was the boss. He had two grown daughters and they seem to hit it off. They're still married, about twenty years.

LEVINE: Now, what's her name?

INGBER: Sontz, [laughs] S-O-N-T-Z, Sontz.

LEVINE: That's her last name - what's her first name?

INGBER: Barbara.

LEVINE: Barbara, ok and what - the last question is - to what do you attribute your ninety-nine and a half years?

INGBER: My longevity?

LEVINE: Yes.

INGBER: Exercise. I never stopped doing exercise. No matter how I feel - if I don't sleep well, if I do my exercise, I get out of it - unbelievable. When I worked for that guy in the piece goods - in the ribbon house - he had a little show - where he kept a lot of goods. I built a chinning bar there because I had a lot of time there [laughs] I used to chin there to keep active because I wasn't that active there. [Laughs] Yea, it was great. So that's why I attribute it - to exercise. And at one time I was a vegetarian [laughs] but that didn't last too long. When we lived on the east side I used to be - I used to take - I went in for a bottle of milk in the milk store - it was a wholesale place - I get a good price. I'd get a quart bottle of milk and I get a couple of muffins - that's what I'd have for lunch [laughing].

LEVINE: Oh my goodness. Well, I'd like to take your picture before we stop and - [pause] - well you certainly had a very interesting and long life.

INGBER: Oh, ahh - [laughs]

LEVINE: Wait, don't go until I - until I unhook you. Ok, I've been speaking with Irving Ingber and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

EI-1414/INGBER