

**EI-1455**

**JACK RUBIN**

**BIRTHDATE: APRIL 21, 1910**

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**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 97**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: HALLIE BORSTEL**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**LITHUANIA, 1921**

**AGE 11**

**SHIP: AQUITANIA**

**PORT: ANTWERP**

**RESIDENCES**

**LITHUANIA: VASILISHOK**

**US: BENSONHURST, NY; VANDERGRIFT, PA;**

**PITTSBURGH, PA**

RUBIN: (LEVINE clears throat) What is – what is – and I think I'd say, what's the theme? And what's the title?

LEVINE: [superposed] The the—

RUBIN: So I know what to – what to—

LEVINE: [superposed] The title is – is – is your life, your – mainly your immigration experience.

RUBIN: OK.

LEVINE: A little of your life before—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: And then coming to this country—

RUBIN: OK.

LEVINE: And then a little about what happened.

RUBIN: OK, OK.

LEVINE: And Ellis Island fits in there. OK?

RUBIN: [superposed] If I get off the course, or so, or – tell me.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: I may be – you may ask a question, I'll go answer something else, so tell—

LEVINE: [superposed] OK, I—

RUBIN: [superposed] T – tell me – I – I—

LEVINE: [superposed] I definitely will tell you.

RUBIN: [superposed] I don't care what you say, if I get off course or talk too much,  
[not understood] put me back on the course, that's all.

LEVINE: OK. I'll do that if you'll tell me things that I don't know enough to ask when they fit in with your story.

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah but if I go – if I go off course—ramble—tell me when – “I really am not interested, Jack.”

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: [superposed] Yes.

LEVINE: OK, I will. All right, I'm here with Jack Rubin, and I'm here in the Jewish Community Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's June twenty-second and (clears throat) this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Mr. Rubin came from Lithuania in 1921 when he was eleven years old and he, I think, left from Antwerp, and—

RUBIN: We were in Antwerp, so, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, you were in Antwerp, OK, and—

RUBIN: L – Liverpool, too. Seems to me, now, as a s – I was eleven years, this is eighty-seven years ago.

LEVINE: OK. All right. And you were on the Aquitania, you remember that.

RUBIN: Aquitania, Cuna – Cunard line.

LEVINE: [superposed] Cunard Line.

RUBIN: C-U-N-A-R-D.

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LEVINE: [superposed] R-D. Right. OK. Please, if you would tell me first, the name you were born with, the name you came here with.

RUBIN: [superposed] N – I – I t – that's what I was going to tell you already.  
Rubinowitz.

LEVINE: Lubinowitz.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: L-U-B-I-N—

RUBIN: R – Rubinowitz.

LEVINE: Oh, Rubinowitz.

RUBIN: Rubinowitz.

LEVINE: [superposed] Right, OK.

RUBIN: Rubinowitz.

LEVINE: Rubinowitz. And what did – what was your name besides Jack? What – what was your—

RUBIN: Yakob, Jacob.

LEVINE: Mk.

RUBIN: Now, o – o – on that, I have a quick little story—

LEVINE: [superposed] Good, great.

RUBIN: About it. Yeah. People in Vandergrift—which will come later, its thirty-five miles from here—are – are all Christian – most of them are Christians, so there were maybe – maybe six thousand families in the town, and there were six – seven – about ten Jewish families. And we were in the retail business, and I got to know them all—all the Christians—and I started to learn about – knowledge about English, and all that. And this – I’m going back eighty-seven years and I didn’t know I was going to do this so I – I – I hesitate at certain times to get my recollection on this.

LEVINE: OK, take your time.

RUBIN: So – so then I went to a – you see, I’m trying to abbreviate, not to make it too long. I went to *yeshiva* [Jewish academy] and I didn’t like it, and I lived with an uncle and aunt in Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, and like – they had five children—the family, an uncle and aunt in Bensonhurst—and I didn’t like the – the – the learning to be a rabbi. We have eight rabbis in a row in our family, from my father on; I was supposed to be number nine. But I didn’t like the rabbis and I got out of – the story to that, but maybe it’s going to be too long, if you have room later I can tell you about that story. But anyway, where I went, with the family—uncle and aunt (clears throat) and cousins—I liked the athletics that they were in—I’m telling you the story about the name. And – and the Christian people didn’t know how to pronounce Rubinowitz, a little bit of which, which, this, that, and th – they had problems. So then we were in retailing and we changed our name from Rubinowitz to Rubin. Of course, the name Rubinowitz – witz is a com – a lot of Jewish people named Rabinowitz from – from Israel, he was the – he was the prime minister of Israel, his name – he changed Rab – Rabin. But they all come from Rubinowitz. And so the Christian people would come to me, they got to know me, I got to know a little English and said, “How come, Jack, that you changed your name from

Rabinowitz to Rubin? What made you change it?" I said, "I'll tell you," and this is sort of a – a little bit made up from – a little bit of this, 'cause I thought it would ma – add to the—

LEVINE: (laughs) To the story.

RUBIN: [superposed] Authenticity of the name. Yeah. And Rubinowitz is—witz is the son of. When you say Rubinowitz, witz is the son of Rubin. Rubin is a tribe of Jacob, one of his twelve sons. Jacob, Yakob. And so, he said, "How come you changed from Rubin?" Well, you know, they couldn't pronounce Rubinowitz and all, but that's not what I told them. Because I figured they would not really fully understand. I said, "Well, I'll tell you something." I saw when I joined my cousins who were keeping me, and th – they belonged like, in Brooklyn, like a JCC, and they s – they had a boxing ring—fighting. And – so I liked that so I became a fighter, and they used to – in Vandergrift which is mostly *goyim* [non-Jewish people] they u – they used to get mixed up with the names and all that and they couldn't pronounce it, and called it all kinds, so I – we changed our name because the *goyim* couldn't pronounce it too much. And we changed it from Rubinowitz to – how do we get to it? I said, "I became a fighter. I did. And I – I was a featherweight in – in Brooklyn amateur. Amateur fighter, OK? I would still run track too, but this was – this was the story – I became a fighter—amateur fighter—in the ring, and one day I was in the ring with a – a fellow and he knocked the wits out of me. (LEVINE laughs) And when he knocked the wits out of me, I became – from Rubinowitz, we knocked the witz – I became Rubin."

LEVINE: That's great. I – I never heard a better name change story as that. That's wonderful.

RUBIN: [superposed] Well, you know, that's the – I'm not telling you anything that isn't—

LEVINE: [superposed] That isn't true. Absolutely.

RUBIN: [superposed] Sure. True.

LEVINE: Yup. OK. All right. So great. So you – that's when you changed your name.  
OK, let's start out – give me your birth date, please.

RUBIN: April twenty-first, 1910.

LEVINE: And—

RUBIN: In – in – in – in Hebrew, it's – it was the first day of *Kheyla Meyd Peysakh* [the  
in-between days of the festival]. I don't know if you want it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Ah, good, OK. And – and where in Lithuania were you born?

RUBIN: We call it Vilna Gubernia. Gubernia's like, the county, like, there's Grodno  
Gubernia, Vilna Gubernia, lot – like here, we're Allegheny County. Vilna,  
Grodno – and that came from the – Grodno Gubernia – the name of the town  
is Vasilishok.

LEVINE: Could you spell—

RUBIN: All right. The two names, they called it, one is Vasilishok—V-A-S-I-L-I-S-H-  
O-K.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: And – and – yeah.

LEVINE: OK, and how about the Gubernia name?

RUBIN: Gubernia is like – it's like a county.

LEVINE: Yeah, and what was – what county was it?

RUBIN: Vilna. Everybody knows Vilna, from the—

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh, Vilna. OK.

RUBIN: V-I-L-N-A.

LEVINE: Right.

RUBIN: My father was sort of – he was – like a *shochet*—it's a slaughterer.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

RUBIN: *Shochet*.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: That's slaughterer. To kill chickens—

LEVINE: [superposed] Now, would—

RUBIN: Kosher. Chickens. What you call it? Fowl, cows – they'd say there's a *shochet* over there, and he was – a – he did the godly things for the synagogue and all that. He was a religious person.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: And he – and he became that when he came to America, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. OK. Now, were you in Vash—

RUBIN: Vasilishok—

LEVINE: [superposed] Vasilishok—

RUBIN: Some call it – some call it over there Vasiliski, an – and on the – on the map it's called Vasiliski. V-A-S-I-L-I-S-K-I.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: In Polish it's Vasiliski. On the – on the map it's called Vasiliksi.

LEVINE: OK, well, you call it though Vasil—

RUBIN: [superposed] Vasilishok.

LEVINE: Vasilishok.

RUBIN: V-A-S-I-L-I-S-H-O-K.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah. Were you in Vasilishok up until you left Lithuania?

RUBIN: Yeah, we left in 1921, I gave you the date.

LEVINE: Yes, OK. What do you remember about Vasilishok?

RUBIN: I – I can tell you now – I – I can tell you the story now—

LEVINE: [superposed] OK, sure.

RUBIN: But how much time do you want me to spend on it?

LEVINE: Well, you know, I would say, for – to talk about this, maybe, you know, you just tell—

RUBIN: [superposed] OK, OK. I'll use my judgment.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

RUBIN: About three, four minutes.

LEVINE: Yeah, good.

RUBIN: I was born in – in – in – in – I – I can go on with my family, and deaths, and war. I was born in – in 19—

LEVINE: Ten.

RUBIN: 1910. First World War started in 1914.

LEVINE: Right.

RUBIN: And finished in 1917. We were three miles away from the battles.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: In the First World War.

LEVINE: Do you remember any battles?

RUBIN: [superposed] Yes. I remember – I'll give you some of – I – it's – even as I talk now, and when I finish you'll say, "How does he know all that, he was only five years old?" No, eleven years old. My mother had me and she died five years later. But for the first time when I was five years old, I – we didn't have any – we didn't have any—

LEVINE: Electricity.

RUBIN: EI – electricity, water – we had to go to – when we washed and all, we went to the *teich*, which is – means the river. We had no toilets; we had no baths, no automobiles. We had airplanes because they – the war was going on. The war started in 1914, which I said. Are you – is this going in on that?

LEVINE: Yes.

RUBIN: So – all right. I wonder just how much to talk on it. And one day—a few little stories—I walked in, I had to go to the bathroom, of course, there was no bathrooms, no baths—

LEVINE: Right.

RUBIN: We had nothing. Many times no food. And this one story, I walked into—I had to go to the bathroom, you had to go outside, outhouses, and sometimes they had the pots and all that to go to the bathroom. And I walked into the room, you know, and I go to – I – I go to lock—you can stop me on some of those things, I could talk for about an hour on it, but I won't—I walked into the room and there, on the floor, w – dirt, what do they call? Mud floors, no such thing. People ask me, "What kind of floor did you have?" Now I have to think. And—it was just mud, you know, no – no wood or anything. I walked

in there and there's – I saw something that was odd on the floor. I get tied up sometimes, you'll excuse me.

LEVINE: Sure.

RUBIN: I saw a body on the floor, but I didn't know what it was. So, I didn't know, so – there were two women on the – one end of the body on the floor, one here and one here. And the body was on a stroller. We had no coffins or anything, just my m – I said, "What is this?" They say, "That's your mother. She – she's dead." [pause] Sorry.

LEVINE: That's OK.

RUBIN: (breathing heavily) But I didn't know what dead meant. I was five years old. So, that's the first time I witnessed it, they had to tell me what it was, but it didn't make an – an—

LEVINE: Right.

RUBIN: An impression on me. Because I didn't know what dead meant. And that's—

LEVINE: Wow. So how – what was your mother's name?

RUBIN: Her Hebrew name was Keyla Rokhel. Keyla is Celia Rachel. Rokhel is Rachel. Y – but it – in – in Hebrew it was Keyla Rokhel.

LEVINE: Could you spell the Hebrew name?

RUBIN: Keyla is C – Carols, and – today – and Rachel is – Rachel is Rokhel and Rachel. Rachel is the English name. And it was one of Jacob's, one of the twelfth tribes, he had twelve sons – Rueben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, [Dan,

Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Dinah, Joseph] Benjamin. He had twelve sons and two – two—

LEVINE: Daughters.

RUBIN: T – daughters. And her – Keyla's like Celia, in that order. Rokhel is Rachel.

LEVINE: OK. Well, now, so, OK. So here is your mother and I guess you found out that sh – what dead meant—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, wh – yeah.

LEVINE: And what happened to you—

RUBIN: [superposed] But they didn't mean anything to me. Left no impression.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

RUBIN: 'Cause I was five years old.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

RUBIN: Rouvin Rubin. But I could say Rouvin – Rouvin Yona, that's the Hebrew name. Rouvin is Rueben, on of tri – Yona is from a Hebrew – Jonah, see. It's Jonah.

LEVINE: And was he around when your mother died?

RUBIN: Oh, yes. He just died recently.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were left with your father. Were you the only child?

RUBIN: [superposed] My fath – no, I was – we had – we had seven – six – six boys and one girl. My mother – my – my – that was my first mother, that was – their m – their mother.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: He – his wife. My father's wife. That was his first wife, she died, and he, naturally, as a – quick little story about that. And if I am going—now this is just what I know—

LEVINE: No, go ahead, you keep going.

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, yeah, but—

LEVINE: And I'll stop you if I want to.

RUBIN: [superposed] But, yeah, you see, well – stop, you know. My father was – I – I'm going to talk, and then do what you want with it. My – my father have a – people to work for us there, not Jewish, [not understood], maids, like. And when they start talking about Jesus Christ and all that non – versatile, without that. But you never hear to interest – too much about. They asked me – we talked about Jesus Christ and all that, and about the religions, I talked – to them, 'cause they don't know anything, I even gave *seders* [Hebrew, literally: "order" or "sequence," can refer to a ritual dinner or a Talmudic study session] in – v – gil – gonna go back, if you want that information. I used to give *seders* to church groups in the churches. For my own knowledge. And some – sometimes we had two hundred in churches, sometimes thirty, sometimes fifty. And we got to talking about Jesus Christ, that he – the second Messiah, that – the one that's – the – the one – the one we always talk about, Jesus Christ. That's he's going to be – come back, and he'll be the Christ. When

you say Christ, means the – the one that’s going – the god – god – the god that they talk about now. That he’s going to come again and he’s going to – we’re going to be freed from all our slaves that we did and all we have done. But he’s going to come back and he’s going to clean everybody off to the point where now they don’t go to Hell. So they said – they said that – that when he comes, then he’s going to say, “If you committed a sin, I forgive you all.” I’m going – he’s going to die as Christ for those sins. So we got to talking about – and they asked me, “Who do you think is going – is going to come? God is going to send another, Jesus is the son of God.” Are you acquainted with those [not understood] that I’m talking about?

LEVINE: [superposed] Yes, I am. Yeah.

RUBIN: So he’s going to come and he’s going to be the God and he’s going to save everybody, the sins I’ll forgive. So this – that’s not what I wanted to say. But, so they say to me, “Who do you think going to be the new God that Jesus Christ is going to – God is going to appoint?” I said, “Oh, I don’t know, you know, it’s up to God.” According to them, I got to go into real thinking, you know, can’t say what I think in a way, so – or – as I said, “Oh, well, I don’t know, but it’s going to be a very, very s – smart man, good man, and he’ll be godlike.” “So who’s it going to be?” I said, “Oh, I can’t tell you that, how will I know? But I can tell you this, he’s going to be godl – godly and everything else.” “Well, is there any person you could think that could be that, that – to fill this – the bill – to be a god?” “I – I hate to tell you this, you know, I – I – I can’t say – tell you who.” But if you would ask me, if you had somebody in mind, I say, “Yes,” and they’d say, “Well, who would it be?” I said, “My father.” (gasps) It’s hard for me to talk about it.

LEVINE: Wow.

RUBIN: So. And then they s – they said, “Why do you say it?” Because I – I’m not going to go into it, the things he has done for people. He couldn’t speak English, hardly at all, but he was such a good man, and he – his qualities of life were godly. He had—

LEVINE: [superposed] Aw, uh-huh. Uh-huh. Now, where did this happen? This happened when you got to—

RUBIN: In – in – to – and we got – my – my brother, two brothers, from – from Lithuania, they came here maybe in 1910, 1914, 1916. And they came by themselves to America, to Vandergrift—that’s thirty-four miles from here—that’s – and they brought us over, the brothers.

LEVINE: I see.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, OK, so, when your mother died, your father was there—

RUBIN: Oh – yeah. OK, I’ll tell you. So then my father’s a godly man, that’s what I – and he – he – he – I always tell the other people the different things as he – as we see, even *goyim*, they want to ask they – they – th – they – they – people, they going – people want to know my history.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: If y – I’ll tell you something about me, not now, if you have room in there.

LEVINE: OK.

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RUBIN: A s – a little story, which is, quickly, about myself. But th – I'm going to mention that now.

LEVINE: [superposed] So then we'll go back—

RUBIN: [superposed] So when he died—

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, your mother died—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, yeah—

LEVINE: [superposed] Your father is there—

RUBIN: [superposed] I'm – I'm trying to – I'm trying not to go off—

LEVINE: [superposed] The track.

RUBIN: [superposed] The track.

LEVINE: Yeah, I appreciate that, thank you.

RUBIN: Yeah – yeah, yeah. So if I do—you see, I think one thing, you know, I feel – but I'm talking about another – it's the first time – and I – how much do I know after five years, I'll tell you sometimes about the war, about him being almost – people wanting to kill him, and all that kind of stuff. But that's something else. But it's all in that year p – pr – not p – present, the soldiers were there. And—

LEVINE: So—

RUBIN: [superposed] Ch – go ahead.

LEVINE: The First World War was going on then.

RUBIN: In – I was born in 1910, the war was started in nineteen—

LEVINE: Fourteen.

RUBIN: Fourt – fourteen, now. I – I just wanted to say that it was – trying to get into that part, I'm – I'm – I – it's – it's rolling bad on the – anyway, so then my – my father was godly, that was the idea. And he – he was the president of bank, had no money, I said, he always believed – the two things that he taught, not to – never to lie. And he hated [beep and background noise]. And – and he didn't like material things. Later on, maybe towards the end, he – he – he – he made *aliyah* [Hebrew, literally: "ascent," the immigration of Jews to Israel] to Israel, not real long ago, and he didn't like money, which is strange, people don't believe you. He gave everything away, he didn't li – to – to – t – my father, that's the type of a man he was.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: And it – that he tells, I'm sort of twisting, but it's in that same circle—

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: It says in the Bible when you're born you come ou – out naked, and you remain – you should re – you remain – your life – you have to have sus – sustenance, for your food and all that, and then you die. And when you have died, you shouldn't take anything with you—you came out naked, you go out – you go back naked [child screaming in background]. So now he had – I'll take a little from my b – *bar mitzvah* [Hebrew, literally: son of the commandments], but that's s – something that depends how much

information you want – he had saved up a s – it’s another story, but I’m just going to give it briefly. He saved up enough money – we didn’t want him to go to Israel, but he saved enough money to have all his expenses, about three thousand dollars. I’ll tell you something about th—

LEVINE: Is this when – after your mother died he saved it?

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, all right, I – I – yeah, OK. I’m coming, my mother died, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: And he d – he had about three thousand dollars for funeral expenses, but he gave it all away before – he was dying, he had cancer, in Israel. He made out an *aliyah* – *aliyah* – that time he gave everything away. He died – he was broke, he gave everything away, the three thousand dollars we need to pay his expenses. But that’s the type of a man—

LEVINE: Yeah, I see.

RUBIN: That’s the type of a man he was. Now, now, I’m going back—

LEVINE: [superposed] Going back to Lithuania now.

RUBIN: Yeah. Now – now he’s – he was a great man. See, you have to understand—and you would because of your position, and all that—that – that he was godly. I can’t tell it to a lot of people, especially in America. But, why, “What do you mean, he gave all – all the money away?” That’s why he’s not going to c – want to come back after a while to my *bar mitzvah*, which is short, but it’s interesting, especially in America. And – and – so now the people say, well, we have to get – he’s already had, I don’t know, he two

sons at that time – I don't know, he had so – I can't – I – I want to abbreviate a lot this. So now – Rabbi Rubinowitz, you know, he's a – and a – a – we got to get him married! He had, at that time, two sons, as far as I – yeah, two sons. Later on, she died and he has to get married again, it doesn't – we need a wife, there's nobody in Vasilishok that's good enough for a – for a r – Rouvin Yona Rubinowitz, you know. He's, like, godly. So they sent one—I told you about Vilna Gubernia—there's another town, like, Grodno, it's a close enough p – it's like New Kensington, and—which is not far from here—Butler, Vandergrift. They – they had another like Vilna—Vilna Gubernia—and they – nobody in the town of Vandergrift would be suitable for a wife for him after my mother died. So they sent a committee of three men with horse and wagon—we know no automobiles, we – nobody ever saw an automobile—to – to Grodno, which is about – like a – they sent three men with a horse and a wagon to this town, like a *shidduch* [Hebrew: matchmaking process]—you know what a *shidduch*?

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: Yeah. They sent him to – to get the *shidduch* to find a wife that would be suitable for a man like my father. And that's – they – the three men went to Grodno and – and they found – to the *shidduch* – to found someone who would be suitable for my father, for his – for his new wife. And then he – she had five children after that – with the second wife – that one was my mother.

LEVINE: Ah. I see. Well, now, you – you were not – the – your father's second wife was your mother.

RUBIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, did she die? Did she die in – in—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, when I was five years old.

LEVINE: When you were five years old. I see.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK. Well, now, what do you remember about the First World War, as a little boy in Vilna?

RUBIN: [superposed] OK. OK. It was a war. I'm sure you can get – in the history – you know, in the library down here.

LEVINE: No, but I mean personally.

RUBIN: [superposed] I – I know, I know. I'm just—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

RUBIN: Adding this. To give you an understanding, like you said, now you ask me that question, because I don't know how much knowledge you have from First World War, see.

LEVINE: Yeah, no, don't tell me about the war. Just tell me what you—

RUBIN: [superposed] What did you ask me?

LEVINE: What you personally experienced of the war. What did you see, what did hear, what did you—

RUBIN: [superposed] Ah. All right, OK, OK. The – one, the big st – first of all – all right, I'm going ramble a little bit, but it's what you are asking me.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: But I'm going go from one to the other because it's part of the deal.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: One big story. I walk into the—the war is on—it's three – a mile, two miles, or three miles from where we live. A lot of stories about it, but I'm trying to eliminate. One day I walk in—like, I walked and saw my w – my wife – my mother, I walk in, I open the door—this is not about my mother—and my father is there, there was soldiers—Germans, not the Germans, like Nazis, they – the Germans were nice—

LEVINE: [superposed] Right. World War One. Right.

RUBIN: They – we could communicate because German and Yiddish is the same, practically, and three men – three – I don't know, say three, and my father is standing like this, as far as I can see, and I'm watching—I don't know what's going on, but I'm watching, that my father seemed scared. One soldier—there were about three or four soldiers—he has a pistol right here, to my father's ear. And what is happening is they were looting—they wanted money, we didn't have money. "What do you have?" They want food—we didn't have food. What – anything – any silver, this and that—they want something. We have nothing. I'm not going to go into what we had and all that, maybe a little wee bit. And my father said, "We have nothing," you know, we have nothing. And, he said, "I'm going to kill you." I – this I remember. I'm not telling you anything I don't remember.

LEVINE: That's what I wanted, yeah.

RUBIN: I – I'm not going to tell you anything – I'm not going to lie and anyways, I don't lie.

LEVINE: [superposed] No, I wouldn't want you to lie.

RUBIN: Yeah, and I told you my father taught me you didn't teach – I say – I say it in a negative. My father never taught me how to lie. Got to tell the truth. And that's the way I am. That's the way I was. And he was going to shoot him, but I didn't know what that meant, I didn't know what shooting is. So it so happens he – he – he had this finger in here and he was going to kill him and, in the meantime, a door opened, an officer came in, and he says, "Put that gun down." And that's all I remember, but, he lived, so—

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: And he – that soldier had to put that down, 'cause the officer told him to put the gun down. They weren't against Jews, the Germans of the First World War. So—

LEVINE: Wow, what an experience, huh?

RUBIN: Yeah. See. Then I had a sister who died two years later – no, wait a second, she died in 1917, I think. No, couldn't – no right after war was over, and she had consumption or something, and we didn't have any food, we didn't have any doctors. Now after she – I was five years old, two years – two years later – two years later, when my – when my father was remarried to the – this woman, who it – it would've been my mother, she had me, and then she had another b – baby after me. I – I think two years later, I'm not sure, about that. And my mother is already – the baby was I – I can't think of the expression, but she – the baby was already ready to come out.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: That's the expressions I know. And – and – and that was my youngest brother, he – he died maybe about last fi – six, seven years ago. And we didn't have a doctor in the town, so we sent – they sent, when I say we – but they sent, the town, my father was one of these, like, a big rabbi in the town.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: And so, we didn't have rabbi – we – we had a – a drugstore – I could never find out about the other drugstore, and no g – no doctors. So they sent with a horse and wagon and my – my – my mother was getting to g – get the baby to come out p – within a day or two. So they took a – a – a group of men, again, like they wanted to get in Vilna a wife for my mother – for my father—

LEVINE: [superposed] Father.

RUBIN: They went to get a doctor. Horse and wagon. It took three days for them to come back, to get a doc – with the doctor. When they came back, the baby was born, on that day. The baby Milton – yeah. He was born but my mother died.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: (crying) It makes me feel bad how we couldn't get over it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: But I didn't know at that time. I didn't understand it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: And we had no food, most of the time. Sometimes we used to get packages, and there's a lot of stories about that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: Yeah. And Milton [not understood] oh, about seven, eight years ago he died. But he d—

LEVINE: Oh, so the baby who lived and your mother died.

RUBIN: [superposed] The baby lived. Yo – he went to Carnegie Mellon, they didn't call it Carnegie Tech at that time from here. And he – he did all right, he was smart.

LEVINE: So what happened to you, when your mother died?

RUBIN: OK. Nineteen—let me see, I'm trying to think what year – what – see, I'm trying to or – or – remember—I was born in 1910, and we – my brothers that w – c – already came to America sent us, two brothers, one of them already died in – over in America – sent for us, my brothers were lonely. And they sent for us from – from Lithuania and – a – to come to America, and his family started to, you know, make room, you see—you stay here, you stay here, four of them stay here, one stays here—and I stayed – I was given away because I – I d – I really don't know why because, you know, eleven years old, and I came to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Let me just clarify something. It was af – right after y – it was soon after your mother died that you came to America?

RUBIN: All right, all right. Yeah. See, n – now. My mother died in – let's see, I – I – I have to – oil this a little bit (LEVINE laughs). Nineteen – she died – nine – in – I'm trying – I'm trying to think – I have it, there, I can't just get it down to get the picture of it. I was five years old, I was born in 1910, so that was—

LEVINE: [superposed] So you must've been—

RUBIN: So 1915 – go ahead, ask me.

LEVINE: You must've been in Lithuania for six more years—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, I – I—

LEVINE: So what – what happened then, did you—

RUBIN: My brothers that were already here—they came here when they were fourteen—

LEVINE: I see.

RUBIN: So – and they opened up a business of some kind, through relatives, and we were all so – eve – and some of the brothers soon got jobs, they went to school, learned a little. And – but I was too young, wh – she – she died, what year now, let's see—

LEVINE: She must've died in 1915.

RUBIN: 1915. 1915.

LEVINE: So you – when you—

RUBIN: So then I was sent away, because everybody – the others were older than me, except Milton, who was—

LEVINE: The baby.

RUBIN: Yeah, the baby. And – and I was sent away, my – my brother d – didn't have much money and all that, so cousins and uncles and this and that say, "We'll keep from a year, I'll keep him." In New York I r – they kept me for – for nine years and I learned English and was with a f – kids who – who were athletes and all that. I went with them, I never had an argument except like – like for instance when I first came to – to New York and I came to my Aunt Tilly and she – she was an in-law—an aunt-in-law—and the first day, it's interesting, this all one thing, it's – it's a little humorous in a way, if not a little sad. And they brought me in—Uncle Max, who was my – my mother's brother—so they – I lived with them for nine years, but the first day they introduced me to his house in Bensonhurst—you know, Brooklyn—and they said, you're going to have to sleep with another, Larry, here—one of their sons—in one bed there, and I went and the first thing this Aunt Tilly said to me, she s – she got on her knees, I was this big. So, she says, "Jack, are you a bed-wetter?" So I said, "Aunt Tilly, no I'm not,"—I spoke Yiddish only—and I told her in Yiddish, I said this, "And no, I am not a bed-wetter." She says, "Because my two sons,"—they were a few years older than me, you know they were already thirteen and fourteen—"They're bed-wetters, and I wanted to know if you were a bed-wetter." And I said, "N – no, I am not, Aunt Tilly." And this was just Yiddish, and the next day, I'm s – I have as – I'm assigned to sleep with my cousin, and he was one of the bed-wetters, and he was three – two years older than me. And he – when he be – bet the – bed-wetted the – in his bed, he shoved

me over, in the middle of the night, as if I did it. So, I think it's an interesting story (both laugh). It's a little humorous.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: So. So the next morning we get up, Aunt Tilly goes up, she makes the bed, I already told her I'm not a bed-wetter, and he – he shoved me over so I slept on the wet part, and when I come down and she went up, and I forgot about it. And then she comes down, she saw, you know, the bed wet, she said, "Jack, I want to talk to, Yankel,"—she called me Yankel—"Yankel, come here. I was upstairs and your side was wet. Did you bed-wetted? I – you told me that you didn't – you – you don't bed wet, you know." Now, in other words, I can see over – I – I wasn't dumb. I lied to her, and I don't lie. Now, and he's standing over there, and he's watching me, and I'm looking at him, and I wanted him to say he did it. But he wouldn't do it. That's my second day there, now I lied. And I – I never lie. So, she says – and what bothered me, and I was looking, and he didn't say anything. And – not that I bed-wet, I didn't care about that, for one reason or another, I lied. Now, what do I do? She's looking at me, she says, "You told me you don't bed-wet, but you did." She didn't say that, but I'm realizing—

LEVINE: Yes.

RUBIN: Already. I lied. But she was nice, and she didn't say anything, I didn't say a word either. I'm looking at him and I see the way he's looking at me—I think he was three years older than me, no, he was fourteen, yeah, that's right— anyway, and he's not saying a word. So, I figure, if she's going to do something she's going to send me back. What am I going to say, I can't even speak English, you know. So later on he bed-wetted again and all that, but then she – she got to know that I – I—

LEVINE: Ah.

RUBIN: It wasn't me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: And I didn't lie.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: And that – that was my life.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: And she knew.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's go back a minute to leaving Lithuania.

RUBIN: Yeah, OK. Yeah, all right. All right.

LEVINE: Your brothers were here—

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Your older ones.

RUBIN: Yes.

LEVINE: And they sent for you.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And who traveled with you?

RUBIN: I had – it was a – n – ap – I had a – a sister who died – died and we had – we didn't have any food, buried it all.

LEVINE: Do you know what—

RUBIN: [superposed] My sister—

LEVINE: What did you eat? What kind of food did you have?

RUBIN: See, everything that you say – I'm expect—

LEVINE: [superposed] Brings up a whole lot of things, yeah.

RUBIN: Yes – yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: I understand you.

RUBIN: I could go on and on and on (LEVINE laughs), so I got to leave it to you.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: If you ask me a question and I know – my memory has been real good on that, and it wasn't bad, to – that is, my life wasn't bad. I had a good b – a good life. Now I am – I'll give you a quick story that happened in here – that answers your question.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: I live now—this wouldn't mean anything to you, but I'll explain it—there's a place here, like, similar to this, but it's for older people – I am older. How – you know my age?

LEVINE: [superposed] You're ninety-seven?

RUBIN: What?

LEVINE: Ninety-seven?

RUBIN: N – yeah, past ninety-seven.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: Ninety-se – yeah. And now – I lived in a re – in Squirrel Hill, three blocks up.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

RUBIN: I'm getting—not now—and I – I str – transferred, I say now, circumstances and so other, I live in that's similar to this, but I have – for older people that can have money or they don't have to have money in order – but it's for older people—

LEVINE: Yes.

RUBIN: They have a little *shul* [Orthodox Jewish term for a synagogue] there, and all – it's three miles from here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: They call it – if I – if I mom – I forget. But that’s where people go when – it – it used to be called Home for the Aged, it doesn’t anymore.

LEVINE: No.

RUBIN: People can have money; they don’t have to have money. You eat there, you sleep there, it’s your home now. And what was the question?

LEVINE: The que – I was asking you what you did eat when you were in Lithuania. You kep—

RUBIN: [superposed] Oh, in – in – in Lithuania most of the time – many times didn’t ha – didn’t eat anything. Sometimes a slice of bread. My father used to leave, he said back to my brothers, “Look, I got two slices of bread here”—one for me and one for my younger brother—“Don’t eat it.” One slice. They used to send from – from – from here, from Pittsburgh, or Vandergrift—which is thirty-four miles from here—packages. But there’s a war going on over – and lot of times we just didn’t have any food, or we’d have little and they’d send packages. Then there were ships coming d – during the war, and they’d sink the ships so we didn’t have anything. Sometimes we’d get sick from it. This one time, got a package, and we didn’t even – we didn’t have any food, hardly any, and we got a package and we tasted it, they sent back ships sometimes, [people talking in background] the army would sink the ships, the Germans or – or – or the enemies. But this time got a package and we took it and we were hungry and all that, and we tasted it and threw the food out.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: Why? We tasted it and we didn’t like it. What you mean you didn’t like it? How can you not like soup when you’re h – food when you’re hungry? So, it

was this, we took the package and we opened and then we started eating it. Well, it was—we thought it was meat—but it wasn't meat, but – because it tasted real rotten. What was it? Salmon. Never knew what salmon was. And you take salmon, and you eat it, and – and you think it's meat – bad meat.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: So we threw it out.

LEVINE: Ah.

RUBIN: You couldn't – you couldn't eat it! Sometimes we'd get an egg or two, sometimes. We were hungry, we were thin, but we didn't know there was – there was anything better. This place that I was trying to – what I was telling you, is three miles—

LEVINE: [superposed] Where you – where you live now.

RUBIN: From here. Three – three hundred people. They're all old. I'm old. Nine – ninety-seven. See. That's what – that's what it is, yeah. So – so – and it's good, but one good meal a day, in the evening. The rest, eh, we have somebody to make something or I make it myself, because my wife h – she – wonderful woman who – she – we were married sixty-five years and she looked so young. But – so we – that's why they brought us over, in a way, because they were – they were here, they were lonely, my brothers that were here already. And we – oh, yeah. So there lot – a lot of the people that come, some of them are rich, you know, and they – we get the – the food, and some of them complain about the food. I never complain.

LEVINE: This is where you are now.

RUBIN: Yeah – yeah. Yeah. Now. Three miles from here.

LEVINE: [superposed] Now. Right.

RUBIN: So they ask me—I'm going to get two stories in to it but it'll – it'll mesh. So some say – they'll come over, people – “How do you like the dinner today?” Now some of them'll go [not understood]. But they're old. I'm old too, but I – I'm look younger than I am. I was an athlete and I was in the ring, I was fighting – I think someone is looking in, do they want you?

LEVINE: Oh, that's your son. Yeah. He's going away. (laughs) We—

RUBIN: [superposed] Oh – oh. OK. So they, you know—this is real quick—but it – it's – so they asked the man, “H – how do you like the food?” “I don't like the food.” Then he come over to me—this happened recently, they would – happens often enough. “How do you like the food, Mr. Rubin?” I said, “It's great.” So then this man that said – doesn't like the food, it's rotten or something, he says to me one time, recently, “How come you always say it's OK? The food isn't any good!” I said, “I don't know, but I—” I – I'm called, some of the people, I'm an analyzer (LEVINE laughs). I analyze—like, you're talking to me—these incidents.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: Why do you do it? I'll tell you a quick little story right after that—

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: Goes in with it. So I said, “I'll have to think why,” so then I did. So one day he says, “Do you know why?” “Yes, I know, I know.” He said, “What is it?” I

said, “You’ve had a lot of food a lot of times. You don’t know what it means to be hungry. I know what it means to be hungry. I didn’t have food a lot of times, so any food is good food for me.” And that’s why I like food, see—I – I haven’t had any of that. So, oh, they don’t understand, that’s OK. Real quick. My wife, and she was – she was such a beautiful woman, and she looked younger than me. And she was six years younger. I was thirty-si – thirty-seven, I got married. She was tw – I was twenty-seven, she was twenty-one. But anyway, she says, “Dear I – I – I – I made a n – a new dish,” [not understood], this time it was. Also, she lived – I lived three blocks from here. And so – yeah, “I want you to taste this to tell me how – how the food is.” So, I – I forgot to – to taste it, when I came back—I went golfing, I came back, she says, “You didn’t eat the soup. You didn’t—” “Yeah, I forgot, dear.” So, she said, “Well, eat it now, and see, tell me how it is.” So sh – I did, and then she said, “Well, did you taste the soup?” I said, “Yeah.” “How was it?” So I said, “Oh, dear, it was good”—it was *shav* [sorrel soup], cooked *shav*—she thought it wasn’t that good, but I thought, “Well, it was good, dear.” She was very nice. So – and she said, “You liked it?” “Yes, I liked it.” And she says, “You know what’s the matter with you?” In that tone, she said, “You know what’s the matter with you? You like everything!” She said, “Why don’t you complain sometimes?” (both laugh) Yeah – yeah.

LEVINE: [superposed] And it’s the same reason, because you went—

RUBIN: [superposed] Same thing.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK, now let’s get on track here—

RUBIN: [superposed] Go ahead.

LEVINE: And let me—

RUBIN: [superposed] Go ahead.

LEVINE: Ask you about leaving Vilna. Leaving—

RUBIN: Yeah, Vasilishok.

LEVINE: Yeah, Vasilishok.

RUBIN: [superposed] OK, yeah, OK. What about it? They sent us—

LEVINE: When you left—

RUBIN: They sent us tickets, yeah, and I went to go – Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Yeah, so you—

RUBIN: Good story, yeah, go ahead.

LEVINE: OK, go ahead.

RUBIN: [superposed] Ask me the question.

LEVINE: So you left the – you left the town of Vasilishok, the village—

RUBIN: [superposed] Y – yeah.

LEVINE: And then you traveled across Europe—

RUBIN: Warsaw, Liverpool—

LEVINE: [superposed] Liverpool.

RUBIN: Antwerp.

LEVINE: And then you—

RUBIN: [superposed] And then—

LEVINE: This ship. Will you remember anything about the voyage?

RUBIN: I'll give you one – one story.

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: It's a good story.

LEVINE: Good.

RUBIN: Ellis Island – you know anything about how Ellis Island is – you don't know, too much, do you?

LEVINE: Well – yeah.

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah, OK. There's a lake there, when you go to Ellis Island. Good lake. This is Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Yeah.

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RUBIN: This is the hospital, this is the lake. When I was there, going—I'm going to try to make this as short as I can, but everything fits in—

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: To your question. They had decks—two decks—the five us, a lower and a higher. My brother was much older than me had the higher one, I had the lower. They have metal beds, metal, you know, beds, regular bed. One fell. I was – nobody's there—

LEVINE: Yeah, OK.

RUBIN: And the metal fell on my head. I still—if you look, you don't have to now—a scar.

LEVINE: [superposed] This is at Ellis Island?

RUBIN: That's at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: So the – the four in my family were in – were – were the regular ones, regular – ge – ge – ready – ready to go – go over to America. And this bed fell and sc – cr – cracked my skull. And I was the only one on the – on the bottom, my older brother w – was on top and it cracked skull and I was bleeding and all that bad stuff. And they were on – where the regular people are and I was by myself. I never complained, I never cried. I never asked, but one thing bothered me, in a way, at that time.

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: When you see me now, I have a yarmulke with me, I didn't know if I was going to meet a rabbi at first or not. And I was worried when I got there I couldn't speak English and they couldn't speak Yiddish.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: And what bothered me—right now, the way I am, I'm not that religious, I keep kosher and *shabbes* [Yiddish: rest], but not too much—and I didn't have a [not understood]. I couldn't [not understood]. Today I don't [not understood]. But in Ellis Island, nobody told me—I couldn't speak English, they couldn't speak Jewish – Yiddish—and nobody told me when I'm going to get out. And I used to hear that – that once you have something wrong and you're in the hospital over there, on the other side of the lake, they don't let you in—they send you back. I thought they were going to send me back.

LEVINE: Ah.

RUBIN: I was there for a week, nobody said anything. I didn't cry, I was eleven years old. And I figured I'll get sent – I said, "What is my father going to do?" Analyze it. "What is my father going to do? What's he going to do with me, because I'm going to be sent back?" 'Cause of that. And people u – visitors from America used to come, see who came in from Europe. Nobody came in for a week, I didn't cry. I knew what they were going to do, they're going to send me back to Vasilishok, when I get better they'll get me. But in ten days they – I was better and they send me back – for ten days I didn't know, nobody came to visit, and they were right across—I almost felt like swimming if I could've! See, and I thought th—

LEVINE: So you must've been scared.

RUBIN: I – I must've been scared.

LEVINE: Yeah. But you didn't cry.

RUBIN: [superposed] I don't – I didn't cry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: I – I was used to all these things, these kind of rules – I – I – I'm try – I want to try, but I think maybe I'm talking too much. So. Too long.

LEVINE: [superposed] Well, let's – let's move along—

RUBIN: [superposed] OK.

LEVINE: To what happened when you left Ellis Island. Was your – did you father's—

RUBIN: [superposed] M – my – my – my – my fa – my brothers came over and the uncle who lived in – where – where you live now on Madison Square Garden.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: East Side, East Side. Yeah.

LEVINE: Lower East Side, yeah.

RUBIN: Yeah, yeah. And they came, and they found – everyday they used to have visitors on the other side and they would come down n – nobody there, nobody. Nobody was there to see me. So if I – I'll get back, I wasn't afraid of anything.

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: I wasn't afraid – I still ain't.

LEVINE: Really.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: 'Cause you went through so much, I guess.

RUBIN: I fight, sometime – used to. When they used to [not understood]. I – I'm not afraid of anything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: I – I challenge – sometimes Jewish people offer [not understood]. You used to fight and [not understood] until I learned to be – I w – I was a fighter in the ring. Boxer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you get – when you were first here, were you considered a greenhorn? Did you get teased and—

RUBIN: [superposed] Oh, yeah, greenhorn or [not understood]. And – and they used to sometimes fight me, and I was afraid, you know. But I – I – I handled everything. For what I handled in Vasilishok—and a lot of times no food, and this and that—I once went – real quick. I – I – I – funeral. A forest, a *goyssha* [not Jewish]—you know what *goyssha* means, I don't have—

LEVINE: Mhm, yeah.

RUBIN: Because—I know you're from New York, so you know (LEVINE laughs)—there's a *goyssha* cemetery, the town, Yiddish cemetery. I went—there's a big

forest—I went to get mushrooms, pick mushrooms. I picked ‘em, and I go out and there’s a *goysa* funeral, and I’m scared. And I heard that the *goyim* killed the kids from Europe, yet. That’s going to kill – a big cross with a – with a minister carrying and going – and I saw them and I went out of the woods and I thought, “Oh, they’re going to get me. They’re going to k – kill me.” So I ran in the woods and stayed there for an hour and a half and then went out so they won’t kill me—the funeral was over.

LEVINE: This was in the United States?

RUBIN: In the United States. Vandergrift, thirty-four miles from here.

LEVINE: Wow.

RUBIN: There are six thousand people, s – ten Jewish families.

LEVINE: Yeah. OK. So, now, let’s talk about you – when you first came to this country you stayed in the Lower East Side with your aunt and uncle?

RUBIN: I stayed there for nine years.

LEVINE: Nine years. And (clears throat) then what led you to – oh, you were going to study to be a rabbi but then you decided not to.

RUBIN: Y – yeah. Yeah – yeah.

LEVINE: And why did you decide not to?

RUBIN: Because the – the family that – the uncle and aunt that lived in Bensonhurst, N – in Brooklyn, they were athletes, and I didn’t want to be a rabbi, I didn’t like rab – I wanted to be an athlete. So instead of being on – on – what was

that street near the Paramount there, on east end – East Side? Anyway – and I liked it. Th – th – they were – they were Brooklynites, and I liked that kind of life, rather than – didn't like – and I wanted a way out, and I couldn't get out of the *yeshiva*. But I found a way how to get out and I got out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what about – why do you think you liked the athletics so much?

RUBIN: 'Cause it's different, I liked it, I was in New York, nobody was bothering me, and I learned how to fight.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: Like – like the – and they called me all kinds of names, and then – even in – with Jews a lot of times, I was a – a greenhorn. I mean, then, I became a Yankee (both laugh).

LEVINE: OK. So (clears throat) when did you come—

RUBIN: [superposed] I mean, excuse me. When – when you're talking about being a Yankee, I – I met Babe Ruth, I talked with him, he took me around, but that's all I'm going to say about that. I went to the Yankee stadium; I took a picture with him. I should've – I lost it. Real quick, I – I interrupted you, I know—

LEVINE: [superposed] Go ahead.

RUBIN: But it just c – it came to me – my *bar mitzvah*, real quick.

LEVINE: Oh, go ahead.

RUBIN: My – my uncle comes to me, he says, “Jack, Yankel, you’re going to be *bar mitzvah*.” I said, “I know.” He says, “You know, going to have to – you’ll have to pay—” he was sort of tight.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: I guess I don’t want to use that word, but he – he just g – got along and he says, “C – do you know your – your *bar mitzvah*, do you know – without m – me giving you lessons?” I said, “I do know it, but, you know, it may be better giving me a lesson to freshen me up,” I don’t know New Yorkers do it, you know. So he said, “I’ll get some to give you about four lessons.” I says – I went to the first lesson in Brooklyn, Bensonhurst again, Eighty-Sixth street and Bay Parkway, and – the guy didn’t listen to me, I knew it better than he did. The one that gave me – to teach me. So I told my uncle, he says, “Well, how are you getting along? Do you think – how much m – how many more lessons you want?” I said, “He’s not listening to me. I’m – I’m – I’m butchering it a little bit, but he’s not telling me that.” So he said, “Oh, take another lesson and see what’s what.” In fact, so then I took that lesson, I butchered it, purposely. And he didn’t correct me. So I told my uncle, I said, “Cancel the lessons.” Anyway, the *bar mitzvah* came on eighty – eighty – Eighty-Second Street, a house-like, that’s all. My – none of my family in Pittsburgh and all that that – came. My father wasn’t there, three people— one, two three—my uncle, my aunt, and a cousin, in a little house they called a *shul*, and three people were at my *bar mitzvah*. I got four pr – three or four present – three presents. One was a baseball glove, I was already a baseball fan—I met Babe Ruth, you know, he took me around, “Sonny, how’re you doing?” and all that. And – and my baseball glove, and I got – one was a ring, something like this, there’s a reason for that but we won’t go into it. I got a ring, my – my aunt gave me a ring. My father ga – he – my father was – wasn’t in at that time, for presents and all that. I got from him the greatest present, even today, that I got from someone, my father. And I

loved it, I – and then I lost it. They were – I would've – could've sold it for a lot of money, but I – and they say, "What did you get from him?" "Oh, it was the greatest, I loved it, I never got a present before." So, listen, I said, "I got a two dollar bill!" (both laugh) Yeah. So that's what it was.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: I lost it later. So—

LEVINE: Now, was your father in Brooklyn, or he was already here?

RUBIN: [superposed] My – my father was in – in Vandergrift, which is—

LEVINE: Yeah, OK.

RUBIN: Yeah, yeah. And then he became a rabbi.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: And then – then he made *aliyah*—to go to Israel—not that long ago. And he became a rabbi in Chicago—Rabbi Zivits [ph]—he's a kn – well-known rabbi, long time – in Pittsburgh is where he got his s – his [not understood], which is r – rabbinat. He became a rabbi.

LEVINE: I see.

RUBIN: And then he made *aliyah* to Israel when he was eighty-five years old.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: OK.

LEVINE: OK. We're going to pause here, 'cause we've – let's see. OK, so now, (clears throat) let's just go ahead and say when did you come to Pittsburgh, what was the circumstance that brought you from New York—

RUBIN: [superposed] OK.

LEVINE: To the Pittsburgh area.

RUBIN: I – I – I can tell you that and I can try to make it short. I was in New York, I didn't know what I was going to do—I'm trying to make this short.

LEVINE: Yeah, OK.

RUBIN: I didn't know what to do and I was graduating high school, ye – Utrecht, the – oh, it was in New York, yeah. I went different places, that's all, some – I went to one – you never heard of Myron Cope, doesn't mean anything to you. Football.

LEVINE: No.

RUBIN: So I won't go into that. Here they know, but here – I went to his family, they kept me – and what about manners, did I mention manners?

LEVINE: They tr—

RUBIN: Everywhere I got along, I d – even, in fact, here, I never went to a doctor's. I get sick and I never s – told anybody. So one time somebody says, "Did you get a shot?" And I said, "No, I'm not going to get a shot,"—I got on once I got sick—"Why don't you want to get a shot?" "Well, they're going to make me – want to charge me some money, or r—" "Did you ever get sick and go to the

doctor?" I said, "No." They said, "Why didn't you go to the doctor?" I says, "Well, if you go to a doctor,"—and I'm living – living with these people—"They charge – they'll charge them for a doctor's visit, and – and they're – they're not charging me for"—it was an uncle and aunt, and I – and maybe – and he said, "Well how much would they charge you? Two dollars a visit." I said – so why – "If they have to pay two dollars for me, they may not like that 'cause they got to pay money." And then so I didn't ask them, I didn't tell them. "So what did you do?" "I didn't ask them, I didn't tell them." "So what'd you do?" "I got better, that's all." I never went to doctors. See. So then I went from place to place to place, and then I went to military camp because I – everybody was going to camp, and nobody would send me because it cost money. And – CMTC, does that mean anything to you, ROTC?

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: Yeah, well, I went to one of those—they paid you to be in the army. And they paid me to go into camp; that was a great deal, boy, I loved it. And then I worked in a post office here in Brooklyn, and I went from job to job—little stuff while I was going to school, two dollars, five dollars a week, or something like. And at Western Union delivering when the stock market crashed. And then I – I worked at a – worked in a post office. Then I didn't know what to do, what I'm going – I went in the army, and I didn't know wh – what would happen to me, I never discussed it with anyone, nobody said anything to me. I said, "I'll work alone." So, a little [not understood], one day, this is—you asked me what I did, that's what I'm telling you, I'm – I'm not telling you anything that's – will take up too much time. So they say, they didn't know what to do, what I'm going to do. I said, "I'll get a job." I got a job for five dollars a week, ten dollars a week. So one day – and I worked with Western Union, they're all going – and one day a man comes in, I was afraid of him, 'cause they were all *goyim*, you know, you know, I was afraid – from Europe, you – so a man comes over to me, he looks like the Kaiser – do you ever

remember how a Kaiser looked, World War One, or heavy-set, you know, like a great big officer. He comes over, now, he's afraid to talk to any of them, so, he comes over to me, "Rubinowitz. I want to talk to you." So I think, "What did I do?" I had a bicycle, I get ten cents or five cents a telegram, and then the stock market fell down, I was delivering better than anybody else. And he says, "I want to talk to – come into the office." I says, "Well, I – I didn't do anything, I never did anything." I was afraid to do anything. So, he tells me, "What are you going to do? I hear you're going to graduate from the Utrecht?" "Yeah," I said, "Yeah." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." So, he says—I'm going to be short, I'm trying to abbreviate it.

LEVINE: [superposed] Mhm.

RUBIN: So, he says, "We watched you." So, I says, "What did I do?" You know, I was taught, you know, be real nice. So, he says, "What are you going to do when you graduate?" So, I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm – I don't know, get a job of some kind, we can get a job for ten, twelve dollars a week." You know, so, he says, "We want – we like you. What are you going to do?" I said, "I'd like to be a schoolteacher." But, I said, "I don't have any money to go to school." So, he says, "I'll tell you. We watched you." I was the only Jew there, and I was twelve years old at that time? I don't know, I don't want to take time figuring it out. So, he says, "We'll pay your entire college, you work for us. You can take a job in the morning or at night, but whatever you do, that time, we'll send you either morning or night, and we'll teach you to be." So, I – I said, I'll – I'll – I'll see – I'll think about it. And I – I always thought, I want to either be a school teacher, I'm going to work in the postal, which I used to in Chr – around Christmas time. And did that all – delivering telegrams, or delivering orders, so, and I – I feel, this is what I'm going to do. Now, you have to wonder what is the reason I picked those things. I picked the – the job—

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, what is the reason?

RUBIN: Wh – why? Security.

LEVINE: Ah.

RUBIN: See. So, I figured, I – I'm going to see. So, in the meantime, my brother came to that stores, they had about two, three stores in Vandergrift, from here, see. And he came, and he was sick, and he was – he had consumption. No food, there's that. He's the one that brought us over.

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: So, he came, he says he's getting sick, he's got to go – go out in the farm, or near woods, or lake, 'cause otherwise he's going to die. So, he came in, I was fourteen years old at the time, I don't know, sixteen. And he says, "What are you going to do?" [not understood] So, I told him, he says – he says, "He's sick." He had stores, he had managers, and he says, "I'd like you to come over and manage a store." I say – I said, "I'm only sixteen years old. I was never in a store." He says, "I – I – I don't have anybody that I can trust." Or do. So anyway, make a long story short, so he says – so – that day, I didn't like it. I went, I said, "I'll take it," and he says, "I'll give you – you're going to manage the store." And then I started and I didn't like it, people didn't like it, I was New Yorker, and everybody accused me of being a smart-ass. You know, I thought I knew more. Here in – it used to be they think – the New Yorkers, they think they know everything, you know.

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: Yeah. And s – and I didn't like it. And – and I was a wise guy. I used to work in New York, you know, they're farmers here. So, I figured, I'm going to get out of here, I don't want this. But I – on that day, I – I w – worked there fifty-two years.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: [superposed] Neve – never late in my life.

LEVINE: Woah.

RUBIN: I used that a lot of times. Never to – and then later I managed, y – y – he gave me his store, he was so good to me, he was so good. And he got better. Fifty-two years I spent there.

LEVINE: Wow.

RUBIN: And I lived with him part of the time, until I got married. And, that's it.

LEVINE: [superposed] Mhm. So who did you marry? What was your wife's name?

RUBIN: Frances Silverman. Her f – father is twelve miles from here near New Kensington—it's twelve miles from here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUBIN: And—

LEVINE: [superposed] And how did you meet her?

RUBIN: I – I felt later on – I felt inadequate about life, and I felt that I couldn't make out too good, I didn't like the people in New York, I felt I was – smart-ass there. And little by little I learned, and went – and I graduated high school, and before I knew it I wasn't liked. I was just a New Yorker that – that were – you don't like him. Lot of people in – they don't like New Yorkers, I was one of them. But then I wasn't liked by anybody—I thought I knew more than anybody else. Actually, they knew more than me, but I thought I knew everything. And then I – I decided through different events that happened – I was going to quit lot of times, and – and – and I figured I wasn't liked at all—I was a New York wise guy. And little by little I decided, "I can't go on this way." I was miserable. I couldn't – couldn't get with girls, I – I – I – they knew more than me, see. And little by little I got to change, I got to become a man.

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: And I did. And today, as I'm – I'm – I'm not going – in Vandergrift, six families, six thousand *goyim*, but what – six Jewish families, or eight, or ten—at the most ten—and I – I'm trying to think. And I couldn't – I – I – I – I didn't know how to talk to girls here. You had to be nice and – and be pleasant, and – and I decided, "I can't go on this way," and my brother wasn't getting well, and I liked him so much from what he did for the family and I was going to be – there were a lot of times he said, "What's the matter with this—sister-in-law is working—or this one," and a lot of people he knew. And I said, "Business isn't so good," he says – he says, "What can you do to make it better?" I said, "You have to fire 'em." He said, "I – I – didn't I tell you to be the boss?" I said, "Yeah." "Aren't you doing things well?" I – "One is your son." He said, "What do you have to do to make him better?" "Whip him." He said, "Well, whip him." I said, "Not me." You s – he sa – his – his wife said – dau – sister is one, she was managing the store [not understood]. Why did she do – she's got to – you've got to tell her – I got to whip her – whip her. I said, "I'm staying with your wife, how can I do that?" With your

sister-in-law. “Do what you have to do.” I said, “I’m not going to do it.” “What are you going to do to get a job?” “I’m going to leave – going back to New York.” “How are you going to make a living?” I said, “I can get a job for ten or twelve dollars a week.” Depression, stock market. He says, “You’re going to do what you have to do, I don’t care what y—” “It’s your son!” “You do it. You’re the manager.” And from there on I went. Here I am.

LEVINE: And you were able to do it? To do what you needed to do?

RUBIN: [superposed] Oh, I can’t – I – I – yes, yes. But I’ll tell you something else. Today – I left Vandergrift—there are hardly any Jews there—I moved to Pittsburgh because they – they’re already – I don’t want to get into a lot because if you have time, I would, but I’m not going to because – any – finally I m – I was there for fif – fifty-two years. Today, I left V – Vandergrift because there – the boys started marrying – wanting to go out with G – Gentile girls. So I told my wife, “We’re moving to Pittsburgh.” You know. Today, I left – they made me the head of the Salvation Army.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: That’s what I – so I s – I said I’m – and I was leaving, I told them, he said, “You can’t leave.” S – s – these were all *goy*, they h – they had to have a man who is – was in charge – I said, “You’re having meetings in it and I can’t read.” The – you had to have a man who is a lifetime member – you got to be there. “I can’t.” He says, “We’re having a meeting, we’re going to get another one.” They had a meeting—all *goyim*—they decided to make me a life member. He says, “You’re going to come to me.” I said, “I can’t, I’m blind.” You know, he said, “We’re having a meeting and we want you to—” “I can’t do it.” “We’re going to bring the meeting to V – to here,”—thirty-four miles away. All *goyim*.

LEVINE: Wow.

RUBIN: They came here. I g – made – made me a – with some – but I had a little help, I – kosher dinner, here. No *goy* – no [not understood]. And I am the head of the Salvation Army.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: [superposed] One hundred and eighty-five *goyim*, the only Jew. I'm just telling you this.

LEVINE: Isn't that wonderful.

RUBIN: F – for here.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RUBIN: I'm – I'm a president of other things, and they're all *goyim*. But they want me.

LEVINE: Isn't that won – that's wonderful. Now let me ask you a couple of questions about looking back on all of this. The fact that you came here—

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: As an eleven-year-old boy—

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you had to really start your life over again.

RUBIN: Yes.

LEVINE: What do you thi – what impact do you think that had on you, on your personality, on your outlook?

RUBIN: [superposed] I – I – it – it – I – I – see – I – n – I – I have never even told Larry some of that. I tell you because that's, you know, it's story of my life, and all that.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yes.

RUBIN: It made me. It made me a real person. I am – I'm just telling you, I mean—

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: It made me a man. It made me a good Jew. One – one this and – a man—a Jewish man who didn't like me—jealous—if people don't like – if – one of big of the reasons they – some people don't like me. Why? Sometimes in a family, too—jealousy. I was advancing into Yidishkeyt. People have be – the *goyim* wanted – I made – *Peysakh* [Passover] you know, to *goyim*, to churches. They want me to speak there. I don't tell that to the Jews and all that. It made a somebody.

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: And it – oh, yeah, this one man says, “Jack,” he didn't like me. Why? Jealousy. So, and he was – six months, just died recently, he was like me – he was six months older – older than – than – than me, he says, he comes here—this is the last one on that—

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: Said, “Jack, you know, they gave you dinners and honor and everybody likes you and you—” people come – now and then a pr – and minister will come, who wants advice about them—

LEVINE: Hm.

RUBIN: Yeah. And so – so he says to me, “Is this Jack,”—he was an – an athlete himself—and he says, “I know they gave you honors,” I’m just—the *goyim*, no, but the *goy* – too, but they, you know, they wouldn’t tell you what [not understood]. So, he says, “Jack,” says, “Look, they gave you lot of honors,” he says, “But you know what’s the greatest thing?” When I was moving, already, away from here. “The greatest thing you’ve ever done in Vandergrift?” [not understood] Yeah, I said, “No, what is it?” “You have reduced”—in the valley, three towns—“You have reduced anti-Semitism in half.”

LEVINE: Oh, my. What a compliment, huh? Wonderful.

RUBIN: [superposed] That’s it.

LEVINE: OK. All right, well, let’s see, is there anything else about coming here, about living out your life here—you have two sons, right?

RUBIN: Yeah, and five grandchildren.

LEVINE: Five grandchildren.

RUBIN: And six great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wonderful, wonderful. So, what gives you most satisfaction of what you have done in your life?

RUBIN: Helping people. And – and – and making it a lot easier for the Jewish people, and to let people have – one minister said to me after I gave some kind of talk of this, an – an –and that, he says, “You know, Jack,” he says, “In,”—oh, you should see, first of all, sometimes *Peysakh* bir – gifts I get from the *goyim*. L – letters, on your birthdays and this and that, and then from ministers. W – and they say, “If,” the minister talk, “If all the Jews would tell us, like you did, about your religion, and do unto us and telling us what Judaism’s like,” he said, “And we would tell you our religion—“

LEVINE: Mhm.

RUBIN: “We – we’d have this a better world.”

LEVINE: Oh.

RUBIN: A minister.

LEVINE: That’s wonderful.

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. OK.

RUBIN: [superposed] That’s it.

LEVINE: Well, I think we’ve covered quite a bit, and I want to ask—is there anything else you’d like to say before we close?

RUBIN: What they – what the ministers and the priests do—they come and talk to me, I’ve had them c – ask me about marriages—a priest, in this case, I said, “Why

don't you tell me? You're a priest!" A – but somebody else came to them about a marriage, and he had to go in with sex, and I says, "I can't go into that," you know, and I help him, I said, "Why are you—" oh, a ma – a man from the group, a member of the church—Larry's looking in from time to time, you know, I think it—so, I said. "Why don't you go to you – your priest?" He said, "I can't do that, they – they're afraid—" I didn't go into it, I didn't want him to tell me, but he said they're afraid – they have those will know secrets, that – a – a – a – and – that the – and the *goyim*, they'll tell each other, but me, they know I – I won't tell it.

LEVINE: Ah. They know you won't tell a secret.

RUBIN: [superposed] I think—

LEVINE: OK.

RUBIN: To the – to the – to their communication.

LEVINE: Right.

RUBIN: To their friends.

LEVINE: I see.

RUBIN: [superposed] I – they—

LEVINE: Oh, so they can talk to you because you're not going to tell their secrets to their friends.

RUBIN: [superposed] That's it. That's what I was going to say.

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LEVINE: I see. Yeah. OK, well, I've been speaking with Jack Rubin, and (clears throat) it's June twenty-second the year 2007, and I want to say that Jack's son Larry has given me a CD—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: Of an interview with Jack at Ellis Island—

RUBIN: [superposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: That was on national television.

RUBIN: [superposed] That's it – that's it.

LEVINE: A twelve minute—

RUBIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Apparently a wonderful one, I haven't had a chance to see it yet, but that is going to be in our li—

END OF INTERVIEW