

AKRF-39

VICTOR RITZ

BIRTH DATE: 1900

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 20, 1985

RUNNING TIME: 55:00

INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

RECORDING ENGINEER: BOB BIELECKI

INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY, NY

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: NANCY VEGA, 9/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

RUSSIA VIA PALESTINE, 1923

AGE 23

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

DALLETT: . . . Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Mr. Victor Ritz on Friday, September 20, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 10:45 AM and we're about to interview Mr. Ritz about his life in Russia and immigration from Palestine on July 4th, 1923. This is the beginning of side one of interview number 039. Let's start back at the beginning and could you tell me where and when you were born?

RITZ: Where I was born. Or when I was born? Where I was born, in Russia, yeah, naturally.

DALLETT: Right. Where in Russia were you born?

RITZ: I was born in, it's called, now it's Latvia.

DALLETT: It's Latvia now.

RITZ: That's right. Before it used to be Russia and now it's Russia again. Russia invaded it. You see, took it away, you see.

DALLETT: And what was the name of the town where you were born?

RITZ: Dwinsk.

DALLETT: Do you know how, would you spell that?

RITZ: D-W-I-N-S-K. Dwinsk.

DALLETT: And what year was that, that you were born?

RITZ: Oh, in 199-, in 19--, let's see, what year I was born. About 1900, something like that.

DALLETT: 1900?

RITZ: Yeah.

DALLETT: Okay. Tell me what you remember about life in Russia at that point. Tell me about your family.

RITZ: About my family. I'll tell you about my family. We

were six children. And we didn't have, I couldn't say we had a very happy life, no, because my father died when I was very young. I hardly remember him, you see.

DALLETT: So your mother was raising you?

RITZ: My mother was left with six children. And the oldest one was fifteen, one was thirteen, one is twelve, you know how it is. Poor people have more children than money, you know, I don't have to tell you that.

DALLETT: And where were you in the lineup of children? Were you one of the older children?

RITZ: I was the youngest. I was the youngest. So my mother used to go, go for business, you know. My father was in, in, he had, he had business, you see. But my mother didn't understand the business, you see. She had to give it up. So my, my younger sister used to take care of me. And my mother used to go away taking care, to look something, to find to, to feed her children, you know what I mean. And then, then it was ten, eleven years old already. No school. No schooling, because I had to feed myself. Had to, had to help my family. I begin to understand the economic

situation. What's going on in my house. So I got a job as a clerk in a, in a dry goods store, being ten years old. So they made a shipping clerk out of me. Naturally I didn't, I didn't know, I had no, not enough experience at that time, you see. Then the Germans, already the Germans are starting to, near, near the town, you know, to attack us. No food. It was a famine. There was starvation. So my mother, I remember like today. I was twelve or thirteen years old and my mother brought some, she went to a bazaar somewhere in a different town. She brought some linen to make some profit, you know, to sell it to, to feed the kids, you know. So I said to myself, "I'll take the linen, I'll go to the farm, on the farm somewheres, and I'll, I'll try to exchange for food."

And, which I did. I took, I walked twelve miles. Walked twelve miles, came at night over there, they let me sleep it over. They were very, very generous people. And I got one hundred pounds potatoes for the, for the, what do you call it, for the linen what I gave them. And I walked slowly, walked, walked, carried it on my shoulder, I was a husky boy, I knew.

I'm not tall enough but I was husky, you know. So, uh, I came at night, around one o'clock or two o'clock

in the morning. I came at night. And I came, I told them I had some potatoes. And I'll tell you, it was a banquet. They made a banquet at two o'clock in the morning. The whole family got up and they cooked potatoes, including myself, and we made a party there.

Here we are, see that? And then, then I got a little bit older so they drafted me in the army.

DALLETT: At the age of eighteen was that, or earlier?

RITZ: That was, that was when the Bolsheviks, they were there already, see. I didn't want to go to the army, you know, to go on the front, you know. So I enlisted in the, uh, as a policeman in the police department. I was a young kid, sixteen. I never had a gun. I never knew anything about guns in my life, you see. So they put, they put me on the main street over there, near, near the railroad station. I remember like today. And I fell asleep. Sitting there on a bench watching and looking, all by myself. And I fell asleep. So, and they have the, have the patrols, they come look around if you don't sleep at night, you know. So they played a trick on me. There was a Jewish man over there, a Jewish fellow. He was the sergeant. And he happened to be fond of me, you know

what I mean. I always did things for me and he liked me. So he took out that, that lock, he opened up that lock from, from the gun, so I couldn't, without a lock there's no gun at all. then he woke me up. "Hey, hey Rich, where's, where's your gun?" So he reprimanded me, you know, and that was all. Next time I knew already. I had to, I knew better what to do. That was the punishment. He didn't punish me, you know. Then the Latvians came in. They took it away. They got the Polish, the Polish and the Latvian and the Estonian. You heard of that, right? So, when I was already about eighteen or nineteen years old, they drafted me. You must come to the, go, go to, go to the army?

DALLETT: For the Latvians.

RITZ: The Latvians. Oh, yeah, the Latvians. But let me tell you. Before they came in, the Russians drafted the police department. The last, the last show, we are running, we are running away, you must come with us. So I knew how to shoot already. I knew. I was an experienced man. I was a killer already, you see that? So my mother, my mother came to the station, she cried, "My dear son, God bless you." Whatever

she, she, she said prayers for me, you know. I shall come back. And at around forty, forty miles from my town, from Dwinsk, that was the front. And we were about forty people in our police station. Friends and even the captain was there. And I had, I had to go into the bathroom. So I went out. And they went on the front, without me. When I came back, I didn't know they were gonna leave me there, you see. All by myself. When I came back I didn't find anybody there.

So I went in the station, what am I gonna do? I have no food. I had nothing. And I haven't got no place to sleep, so I found a bench. I sit down on it. Sit down and I was afraid to think what's gonna happen to me. Maybe they're gonna punish me for, for deserting, you understand what I mean? Finally the train came back. "Who wants to go to, go to Dwinsk?" On the station where I was sleeping. I says, "Who wants to go to Dwinsk? Me." Who do you think were in that train? Those, all those people who went there, forty people, forty men. They were all killed. Frozen bodies were, they brought them back from the front, frozen bodies, and an escort, to take them back to, to Dwinsk. And in Dwinsk, when they came back to Dwinsk they made a, they made a, a collective funeral,

whatever they call it. In the middle of the town and they put, they buried all the people. And me, what did they did? What they, what they did, instead of training me as a soldier they sent me all the way to the Forest. They needed some new countries, they needed, it wasn't an industrial country, Latvia, see?

So they sent me to the forest to, to cut wood. In the trenches, they built trenches in the war. So they used a lot of wood, you understand? So they wanted us to take the wood apart. To give the population something to keep warm. Naturally, while working, working, keeping the saw here, the saw there, I tore my pants. One day, working with torn pants. Another day. Then I said to myself, "Why should I work with torn pants? Why couldn't I get new pants?" And I went to my, to my superior to, to commander, whatever, and I said, "I want some pants." "Okay, we'll get you, okay. All right." So whenever I get the pants I'll go to work. And I was walking around eight months (he laughs) with cut pants. And I didn't go to, I didn't go to work. That's a fact, I assure you.

(he laughs) Then that happened to me. I had a, I had a letter that one of my youngest brother had a (?). He was operated. So they took him to the town,

to the capital, Riga. You heard of Riga.

DALLETT: Riga.

RITZ: That's right. And he was a nice, nice little boy. So naturally it's family, you, you want to see. So I left in the middle, I got up in the middle of the night without any permission. And I had to leave town. See, in the army you have to ask permission to go. So I did not. Finally it took me about, about two hours, telephoning all the hospitals to find out where, where my brother was. Finally I locate where, where he was. And everything was okay. So I figure, I saw already what was going on, my, my brother's condition, how he was. On the way back two soldiers stopped me. "Show me your permission." I didn't have any. So they took me, two soldiers, I was under, I was under arrest, you see? They brought me to my, to my company. And he, the colonel, he was laughing. He laughed. I thought I'm dying and he was laughing. (he laughs) So I explained what it was all about. So he didn't punish me, no, no. Everything was okay. And I still was waiting for my pants. I didn't still get my pants. I didn't get it yet. So, finally, after they got, they have, they have words, that they

came Latvia. Came in, in agreement with Russia. That who wants to be, I'll be a Russian citizen and who wants to be a Latvia citizen. So I decided I'll be a Russian citizen, you know, that's a good get out from the, first of all, I didn't know their language. It's a different culture entirely. You know what it is.

So I decided I'll be over to, to be a Russian citizen.

And I had a sister here in this country, so I decided, I wrote her a letter, I says, "Times are very, times are very bad. Actual starvation. People are starving." When I was, when I was riding, when I was a kid yet, about twelve, thirteen years old, I was riding and I see a soldier was having a loaf of bread.

And I looked at him. I didn't, I didn't dare to ask him for a piece of bread. But I just looked at him. I looked with looks just like, just like a, like a dog looked at, looked at his master's face when he's eating, you know what I mean? That's exactly how I looked at, at the soldier's face that was, that was tearing bread without a knife. Just tearing it and eating it. So finally he threw a piece of bread at me. And I wasn't bashful. I picked it up.

(he laughs) I ate it. And that was the end of it, you see. Then my sister, my sister, now, that's a

piece I left out before, see. So my sister decided she'll send for me.

DALLETT: How, when did she come to this country?

RITZ: Oh, she came before. She came, she came when I was a very small boy. As a matter of fact, when I came to this country I, I almost didn't recognize her. I was a boy, I was maybe about six, seven years old.

DALLETT: And did she come with other brothers and sisters, or how?

RITZ: No, she came by herself.

DALLETT: She came by herself.

RITZ: No, no, she came by herself. We had an uncle here. And he is the one that sent for her.

DALLETT: I see.

RITZ: Then she got married and she had a child here, you know. She wasn't well off but she was better off than I was, you know. So then instead, instead of going to, to this country I decided I will go to Israel. It's a new country, it's adventurous. You, you made it a new life. So I went there. And I'll tell you

something. The hardest, hardest life that anybody can have I had in there. But, it was a happy life.

DALLETT: Let me ask you this before you tell me about Palestine. How did you make those arrangements? When you said you were going to be a Russian citizen how did you manage to then go to Palestine?

RITZ: I was a Russian citizen. Actually I was a Russian citizen. But they said, they said if I want to be a Russian citizen I have to stay with them but I'll never, I'll never get their passports. I'll never get the privileges that they have, you know what I mean? But I knew what was ready, because I didn't want to go, I didn't want to stay with them, with the Latvians. I had to go to school all over again and learn their language and what. And I heard they're the biggest anti-Semites, whatever, you know. So finally I decided to go to Israel, not Israel, but Palestine. And my mother came to the station and she cried, "I'll never see you again." You know what it is, Jewish women. So we came to Berlin and then this wasn't my idea. People told me to buy, to buy, to buy some ammunition when you go to Israel to protect yourself from the Arabs. You know, I don't have to

tell you, you know the whole story about they're against, against the Jewish people there, you know. So they knew, they knew a locksmith. And we bought, you know, the flash that the soldiers carry to put, to keep, when they go on the front, for water, you know, water or they keep liquor. So we used to open up, the locksmith opened up that, that bottle, put, put that, a double, a double deck inside. You know what I mean? Like this.

DALLETT: It was a flask.

RITZ: Flask, that's right. Put in here. Cover it up, cover it up with tin, with a piece of tin.

DALLETT: Tin, yeah.

RITZ: Soldered it up after, and then on top, put on water. Or liquor, whatever. So, in case anything happens. So I had it, it cost me a few dollars and I, and I, I figured in case anything. So when I come there I'll have ammunition because when you come there you weren't allowed because the English, England was dominant. So then came up the Jewish when I arrived in Haifa, you know, you know Haifa, when I arrived in Haifa, the management for the trade unions over there

came up and said, "Anybody who has ammunition, dump it." Because the English, English observers have to be there. And a lot of them had to dump it. We'd all gone to all that stuff, but we had to dump it. So after that, but this doesn't bother me. After that I figure I have to be killed, whatever, with or without. So then it was a question of labor. I have no money. Money, I didn't have any. So I had to look for, what, what, I had no trade. So manual labor, you know. To work on the (?), they called it, on the road, making new roads. I was working, I was working with a man. Usually you have to buy, you have to get, you buy, for cement, you buy a pair of gloves to, to preserve your skin. So I was working without. I had to, I had to eat. And I was getting just thirty cents, thirty cents a day. So we were working and working. Here a machine does it. In there we had to do it by hand. It was a new, a new country. So I got holes in my hand, in my fingers. Bleeding. And I kept on working. Then we needed, then we needed, they call it gravel. In there they call it "hatzat," you know, in Hebrew language. So how do you, how do you, there's no machine. Here a machine does it. Put it there, big stones in a machine and a machine melts it,

whatever, whatever, it grinds it. So we sit down in there on another stone and take a stone next to you with a hammer. Chop, chop, chop, chop, chop, chop. The whole day long. And the sun is baking, you know there's a hot climate. The sun is baking. But you got to eat. You figure you have to eat, so you do it, that's all. Rooms. We slept four or five in one room. Two in a bed, alternate. One on the floor. One on a chair. You tried it. But I'll tell you something, it was a happy life there. The spirit, you see, the enthusiasm, you haven't got that, that worried (?), you know, the Russians and the Latvians call it the same things, you know what I mean? To hate, to hate the Jews, you know. So after, after the work, used to come in and wash yourself a little bit. And go out dancing the hava nagila, you know what I mean. That was, that's all, that, that was the whole life. But I began to think of the future. I was getting older.

DALLETT: How old are you now? You're twenty-two at this point?

RITZ: I was about twenty-one or twenty-two. Came to the point I have to think about the future, you know. I says, "In Israel I have no future." That's a sure

thing, for me I didn't have, because I told you, I have no trade. I love to be, if I, if I could have found work over there I probably would have been, I would stay there, even now, you see. So I decided, so my sister, again, she started to ask me to come back, to come to this country. So, but, there was a quota, a quota to come. Every, Russia, fifty Russians have to come in, this year, to this country. I, I was the, the fiftieth. Forty-nine were in there already, see. And I was the fiftieth. Forty-nine were in there already, see. And I was the fiftieth. So I worked and my sister sent me some money. And I went and I bought a ticket, a steamship ticket. I told them, I told that man, that agent, "Look, I have to be, I have to be on time. Otherwise I'll be stranded in, in France." Because they wouldn't let me in the United States. "Oh," he said. "You have nothing to worry about." So, but I was, somehow, I don't know, I wasn't smart enough, but I know some kind of thought came in, came to me. I said I would like to have it in writing. To be insured that in case, in case I don't get there to my destination, I shall be able to get my money back. And my prediction was just exactly right, you see. The ship was trouble for the big, big

waves, you know, big storms. And the ship came in forty hours, forty hours late. And my, when, my, my regular ship had to go, so they left already for New York.

DALLETT: Where was this from in France?

RITZ: That was in Cherbourg.

DALLETT: Cherbourg.

RITZ: No, no, no. Marseille.

DALLETT: Marseille.

RITZ: Marseille, that's right.

DALLETT: How did you get from, did you travel by train, by train to Marseille?

RITZ: No. I came to Marseille by, by . . .

DALLETT: Oh, that was by ship.

RITZ: Cherbourg, Cherbourg. I went to New York from Cherbourg.

DALLETT: I see.

RITZ: So, so I, there's a, I don't speak French. And I

don't know, I didn't see any Jews there. So finally some Jewish legation came to the, to the ship. And they tell us, just like HIAS, you know HIAS? Something like that. So they took us there, they took us all the, all those people who were Jews who are going to, to United States, we slept overnight. But, what's going to be the future? I, I missed my boat. What am I gonna do? So at first I thought I'd get acquainted with, with, with friends, you know. So I used to walk around, I see, I see a man with a beard. A man with a beard was, was Jewish. Nobody, nobody had beards in Russia. So I came in, I used to, "Are you Jewish?" In Yiddish, do you understand Jewish a little bit?

DALLETT: A little bit, yeah.

RITZ: "Qu'est que sait?" "No comprend pas. No comprend pas." "Etrange." Something like that they used to tell me. A stranger, something like that. And I kept on going like this. Okay, fine. But how long can I do it? So once somebody recommended me to go to eat, when I came to Paris already. From Marseille I came to Paris. They told me there is a Jewish restaurant. Because if I got to a French restaurant I'd be

starving up till today because I wouldn't know what to order. (he laughs) I'd spent my last, my last penny. So I went over to a man, "Are you Jewish?" So he says, "Yes, what, what's, what would you like?" So I told him, I said, "I'm very, I'm very nervous. I have an assignment. I'm going to New York. I have a sister. But until I come to my sister," I said, "I don't know what, what to do." I said, "I don't know a word of English." He says, "Where are you going?" I says, "I'm going to New York." "New York?" So he said to me, "You speak Jewish?" He asked me if I speak Jewish. I said, "Yeah." "If you don't speak Jewish you can't be in New York," he says.

(he laughs) So that, that, that cured me. So I wasn't so in doubt, you know, about what's going to be. But still my expectation, how am I going to meet my people? How am I going to greet anybody? So I went, I told you I went to eat in there, at Rue de Roulie. Were you in Paris?

DALLETT: Yes.

RITZ: You know Rue de Roulie near the Bastille? Near the Bastille? Okay, fine. I came there and I got with people there and I started to really worry about

myself. What am I gonna do? Stranded there for eight, nine months. How am I gonna live? I cannot ask my sister to send me money. She has no bank, she's not a banker. So I got a job. I got a job as an assistant truck driver on a truck taking, carrying furniture. Delivering furniture to whoever buys it. Okay, fine. I was happy about it. I was getting eighty francs a week. And eighty francs a week is just like the, at that time, like the forty million dollar lottery over here. That, that's how I felt. I moved to a hotel. Used to run to the opera every once in a while, go to shows, here, there. Get acquainted with the, with the culture, whatever. Of course, I was economical, you know what I mean. Breakfast, you know, I used to, I used to, in there in a, in a, in Paris, maybe you were there, maybe you know this. In the hallways, like in here they have in Orchard Street in New York. The peddlers selling frankfurters. So they used to have in the hallways selling cocoa, hot chocolate. So for two francs, for two pennies they used to give you a big bowl of chocolate or cocoa and a big slice of French bread with butter. So it was well worth it. Why go in the restaurant, I figured to myself? I became an economist. (he laughs) So and

that, that's exactly how I accumulated my fortune, you see. And I worked eight months, working with a, he was a nice driver. So, all I know, I didn't have a chance to go to school in there because I knew I wouldn't learn French.

DALLETT: This is the end of side one of interview number 039.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number 039.

RITZ: So I had, I had fun with that driver. I did my work. But all I learned I learned from him like this. "Qu'est que voulez vous, monsieur? Vin la rouge ou vin la blanc? Vin la rouge. Vina la blanc?" That was on every two corners. And there was in, in, maybe you know this in Paris. They have the men's room, men room. Have, you can, you go in and on every second corner. You see the half, half, you see the half for the men. So that besides delivering furniture that, that was what I had to do. Drinking wine and go to, go to the bathroom. Vin la rouge. Vin la blanc. Vin la rouge. Vin la blanc. That's all. When I came

home I didn't feel like eating already. I had enough vin la blanc. Okay. Now we can finish with the French. Then finally, start and stop by going to.

DALLETT: So you saved up money now so you have, you have the passage money to go to America, right?

RITZ: Yes, no, no. I didn't have but I had to sue that man. I had to come there and hire a lawyer to the, through the people that I know already. I told them, I said, "Look, here it is in writing. That you promised me if not you'll return me the money."

DALLETT: Right.

RITZ: And if you'll return me the money I'll be well off. And sure enough I got it. I got the money. So I got the money so I didn't care. I was easygoing then. I went and bought myself a new suit. Beautiful suit. New shoes. And I, I felt I'm Rockefeller's son, whoever it is.

DALLETT: Let me ask you this one question. When you decided you were going to come to America and you were one in the quota that were allowed to come, did you have to go through a process then, examination, and all that?

RITZ: See, I went, I went to Jerusalem, there was an American Consulate, understand? When I came there they told me there was a quota. And then that's how I went and I got my, my passage, my ticket to go there. Otherwise I wouldn't even know that there was a quota, you understand?

DALLETT: Right, right. So did you have to go through physical examination at the American Consulate there?

RITZ: No, that came in, no.

DALLETT: That's later.

RITZ: That came in Ellis Island.

DALLETT: Okay.

RITZ: That's in Ellis Island. So we went to, when the time came, after eight months, you know. So I had no, I had no hardship to, to get my passage to New York. Naturally third class, in steerage. And suffered a little bit from the, ah, sea sickness, you know what I mean. And I ran, I ran to the captain and I said, "Look, captain, get me something, something." He said, "Look, I can't do nothing for you." He said, he spoke to me in German, German I understood a little

bit, you know. "My soldiers are sick. My, my workers, the crew from the ship are sick. What can I do for you?" So four days I didn't eat at all. I was just lying, lying on a pile of, lying, just looking for fresh air. Then I said to one of the stewards, I started to feel better. "Get me a little bit, something to eat, you know, otherwise I'm gonna die from starvation, you know." So he went and brought me a nice piece of roast beef with a, with a potato, with mashed potato. When I saw that I said, "Take it away, it's gonna happen to me, the same thing all over again." (he laughs) So actually for five days I didn't eat. Until I came to Ellis Island. And my expectation when everybody was yelling, "Hey, it's New York, it's New York. There's the Statue of Liberty. There, that, you see." And everybody was thinking of themselves, who's going to come to greet them, to meet them. I know I had a sister. My sister knew that I'm coming, when the ship arrives. So, my sister wasn't in New York. She was in, she went in the country for vacation. She went in the country. So who did she send? A representative, my aunt. And I didn't even know her because she was a, when she left, to America, I was maybe three years old. Not even three years

old. So she said to me, she presented some letter that she, she came to fetch me from the boat. "Who is Avigda?" My name was actually Victor, but Avigda, a biblical name, you know. In the, in the Bible, see. Avigda Ben, son, Ben Israel. Means I'm a son of Israel. My father's name was Israel, see. And here they made a big man out of me, they called me Victor, you see. Okay. So she came over, came over, "Hello, Victor, hello." I look at her. I was afraid to ask her, "Who are you?" I didn't recognize her. Finally she identified herself, she told me who she was. So fine. She, she showed them the credentials. I got mine, then they started questioning me, they gave me examination, they looked at my eyes, and they asked me if I have any money to, I shouldn't have to come to, for, for relief from the government. I had to show my fifty dollars. And everything was all right with me.

So . . .

DALLETT: What language were they speaking in to you?

RITZ: They spoke German.

DALLETT: They were speaking German?

RITZ: German, yes. And they told me if I can, if I know how

to write, I told them I don't write English, I don't write, but I can write Russian and, and Jewish, you know. So I was all right. I passed the examination.

DALLETT: And you got to see your aunt before you went through the examination or was that afterwards?

RITZ: After.

DALLETT: Did you go through the examination before you saw your aunt?

RITZ: The examination doesn't take long, you know, it doesn't take long, you know, you go through, you know, just like, like standing on line. Dishing out soup. (he laughs) But when they came to look for trachoma, that's a real, they examine you thoroughly, you know. And they find me eyes were in good shape, you know, even now. I'm a few years older and my eyes are in good shape yet. So my aunt takes me, started take me home. "Okay, let's go," in Jewish, not, not, I say it in English, but she said, (Yiddish), you know. Okay. So she took me down. I don't know how I got to the Third Avenue elevator. I got the Third Avenue elevator and I had to walk up all those, all those stairs. In France I was riding around in taxis,

I had money. Here I said to myself, "Is this America? This is New York?" Climbing all over, all over the town. Then she takes out a bundle with peaches, whatever she had, apples or peaches, I should eat on the train. I says, "I'm sorry, where I come, we don't eat it. We eat home, we don't eat on the train." That's what I told her, you know. I tried to show off myself, that I'm an intellectual, whatever.

(he laughs) Whatever it is. Okay. finally we arrive, arrive in the little, arrive in Little Italy. What you call Little Italy in that block where my aunt lived. It's mostly, 99 percent Italians. And my aunt, and my aunt happened to be, live over there. So she, and she advertised. She's gonna get, she's gonna get, going to the boat to get the greenhorn. She'll get the greenhorn from the boat. So they picture, you know, years ago, greenhorns used to come, used to come with a big forehead, with a big valise. I had money, you understand what I mean. I came. So they're asking, "Where's your, where's the greenhorn, where is he?" So she say, "Here." "That's your greenhorn? He looks like an American. What's the matter?"

(he laughs) That's the greenhorn. Okay, fine. So finally got upstairs. My aunt prepared something for

me to eat. Naturally at that time they used to use herring, a piece of herring yet, remember that? You wouldn't remember that, you're too young, you're too young.

DALLETT: No.

RITZ: But I remember it. I'm still longing for that piece of herring. (he laughs) So you start to talk business. So I slept one night or two nights. So a neighbor next door, my aunt, my aunt's neighbor, her husband died. So she would like to have a border. Okay. So I, I took a room. So I take a room, a nice room. And I went to the movies and I came out from the movies. I came back from the movies. I looked for the switch where, where, where I can get light. I want to undress myself, go to the bathroom, whatever, to wash myself. I look here. I look there. I was smoking at that time yet. I lit a match, I can see no. So finally I went to bed without, I undressed and I went to bed. In the morning I waked the minute I got up, I said, "Where, where are the lights, where are the switch?" I said I couldn't. "We don't have no lights. What do you need a light for?" They had a lamppost right, right near the window. So that, that

was the light, you understand, you understand? So they got my five dollar deposit, I didn't ask for the money. I just moved out. Two days I stayed there. I moved out. Then naturally I got a different room. And I went, I went to, finally went to my sister. My sister was in Hunter, in Hunter, New York, if you know where it is. So naturally, you know, she was also expecting me. She came there. You know, pleasantness exchanged. Pleasantness here and there, whatever it is. And sure, she met some friends over there and, "Oh, I have a nice boy, he's a nice boy, a nice young fellow. I got a job for him." I said, "That's a (?), nothing else, but I expected to find a job, but without looking for it." What was the job? The job was in Nedicks. You remember there was Nedicks, Nedicks store on 14th Street? So, that was, that was, I was one week or two weeks with my sister in the country. She gave me a break. My brother-in-law bought me a suit, bought me a couple of suit shirts and I was a big shot already. Begin to pick up a couple of words of English here and there, here and there, whatever. So, he gave me the job. I came on time. So they told me, "Five cents is a small glass. Ten cents is a big glass." So customers used to come

over and ask me, "What do you want? Five cents or ten cents, five cents or ten cents?" That kept on the whole day long. Five cents, ten cents. So, sometimes customers says, begin talking to me, and I laugh. I can't answer. What can I? (he laughs) He talks to me. He laughs and I'm laughing, too. So we're both laughing. So the customer watching, maybe they're dumb or smart alecks, whatever, so they used to walk away. So finally that job ended, I saved up a couple of, a couple of dollars, I saved up a few dollars and sent it away to my mother. And I got myself another job. What was the other job? Better, more aristocratic job. I already saw there was a pushcart selling ties. And I was supposed to be the customer. Be a customer picking ties. Just, just picking ties. Taking money from the pocket to here. Here's five dollars, take three or four ties, go in, come back, bring the money, bring the ties, and start all over again. It was the whole day long like this. I was getting twenty dollars a week. But that's all right. So after a week they find out it's all fake business, you know, whatever, whatever it is. And my job, no job. I went away, go to my sister. I see a big pushcart. A lot of people stood there. Selling

socks. Six pair of socks for fifty cents. All right, I come to my sister and I show her. "Look at it, look what a bargain this is. A half a dollar for, fifty cents for six pair of socks." So I opened up, I opened up that bundle, it was all wrapped up nicely, just like from the factory. So sure, if it's a great pair of socks, one was a stripe, was long. And one was a stripe that way. So from six pair of socks I couldn't find one pair. I couldn't match it. So I gave it away to the super. That was my bargain I got, see?

DALLETT: Were you starting to pick up English now, starting to learn English?

RITZ: Oh, yes. Oh, that's nothing. So then I got myself a job as a dry goods salesman on Broadway, Blackmers (?), maybe you heard it? Bleecker Street. Broadway and Bleecker Street. I worked there. I started with twenty dollars a week. No, with sixteen dollars a week I started. And they used to give you a raise every holiday. Every holiday they give you a raise. Two dollars raise we find in the envelope. So I worked about a year, a year-and-a-half. And each holiday I used to find, find two dollars. That used

to, because, that was nothing, what it amounted to, I hardly had room and board and, and food, it wasn't even enough. But I had to economize, what, what could I do?

DALLETT: In the meantime had any of your other brothers and sisters come to this country?

RITZ: No, when I came I had another sister already. I forgot to tell you. One sister came before me yet. She was established but not well enough to take care of me, you understand? But that sister, the one who brought me, she's still alive. She's, as a matter of fact I saw, she's old already, and very well off. In the millions. I'm not kidding you. That's the truth. And ah, so, one, one holiday I didn't find a two-dollar raise. So I says, I told them, I says, "I'm quitting." "You're quitting." He says, "Why?" I said, "Look, I didn't find." He says, "Look, we have to balance the budget, we can't do it. We have so many help. Maybe I have a couple hundred help. Each one should get raises all the time." "Okay, I'm quitting." So, before going home they came over to me, I remember his name was Mr. Swaney, that's right. He came over to me, "Okay, Victor, we decided we'll

take care of you, we'll get you the raise." I said, "I'm sorry, too late. Too late." My sister was in the Catskill Mountains at that time. I decided, it cost three dollars a ticket, two-and-a-half dollars, I remember. And I went away and I got myself a job as a busboy. Got a busboy job for Decoration Day.

DALLETT: For the what?

RITZ: Decoration Day.

DALLETT: Decoration Day.

RITZ: So I made in three days how much I made, I made in three weeks over there. Said, gee, a new horizon opened up for me. A new world. I made fifty dollars. Fifty dollars in three days. And they were satisfied I should come next year, because they were only working for the, for the season, you know. Not winter. So I got myself a job, a different job in the delicatessen store. So I was a big shot, I know already, I begin to know how much this, how much that, and how to take care of the tables. And I got a job as a waiter. True, they exploited me. I worked from, from five o'clock till eleven o'clock at night. But, look, you have to go through what you have to go

through. But I saved up a thousand dollars. You understand what I mean? I saved up a thousand dollars. At that time, a thousand dollars was a fortune. So, in New York, you know, you, you, until I got a job here I got a job there. Finally through recommendations I joined the union. I read, I knew the trade here and there, I joined the trade. I joined the union got union wages. Saved up a few hundred dollars. Then I decided to go in business for myself.

DALLETT: What business was that?

RITZ: what?

DALLETT: What business was that?

RITZ: Same, same, I bought a luncheonette in Jackson Heights, with a partner. My partner was drafted for the Second World War. They wanted me, even then, they wanted me, too. So I told them I have hayfever. I brought them that vacation from the doctors. He says he's got severe hayfever.

DALLETT: So you had become a citizen by that time?

RITZ: Oh, yes. Yeah, oh, yes. I became a citizen.

DALLETT: How long, how long did it take before you became a citizen?

RITZ: Five years.

DALLETT: Five years.

RITZ: Sure, five years. First, first you wait two years for the first papers. Then three years later, you have to wait three years to get the second papers. Then we had my mother, and we sent for my mother. She came here to visit us. She was with us for eight months. And she went back and she died on, but at least I had a chance to see her, you know what I mean? And that, that is the story of my life. It was nothing, but, after I worked again I got a job in Rattner's. You know Rattner's on the Lower East?

DALLETT: Rattner's, yes.

RITZ: Not on, on Second Avenue. That's the better, the better Rattner's. All the, all the artists and the intellectuals, that's true. I worked there quite a few years. Saved up a few dollars, became a big shot. Got acquainted with Wall Street here and there. And I tried to, to figure things out in my head, you know.

And things went my way. So it came, it worked the other way around, you know? So we got a little depression. And I was wiped out. But I wasn't discouraged. So I got a job. As long as I could get a day's work, if I knew something. I wouldn't ask anybody for a, for a penny. I used to come to my sister. She used to say, "Victor, are you working?" I says, "Yes, yes." I used to have chewing gum for breakfast, so help me. I never told her that's I have no money and I'm starving. So, and as time passes by, goes on, I got older and it came time to retire. I retired, I joined the Y. The 92nd Street Y, you heard of that?

DALLETT: Sure.

RITZ: They have a drama, a drama, drama class. I joined the drama group. You heard of Paddy Cheyovsky?

DALLETT: Yes.

RITZ: I was playing in Paddy Cheyovsky's for three years almost. Then they got me into the equity union, equity union. I played, the last job I got in (?). In "The Tenth Man." You heard of "The Tenth Man?" You heard of (?)? Extras, or whatever they call it.

And I got four hundred dollars a week for that. And I, I just started, they needed an extra man. One of the men didn't show up. And I joined the theater. And I found this young lady. She was a professional actress already. You see that? Then I, I put up quite a few shows with her. She was a very able actress. We put up a show, we put up a show recently, about six months ago. Anne Frank. I was a detective and she robbed the bank. We had to perform, to perform from the show, and I tell you something. There isn't a church or, or an old age home, a nursing home, whatever, all played with the biggest respect. How do you like that, huh?

DALLETT: Wonderful.

RITZ: Now I'm a retired man. And I'm waiting. I have a nice uncle. Uncle Sam is sending me checks. And that's, that's the story of my life.

DALLETT: That's a wonderful story and I thank you for telling it to me.

RITZ: You liked my story?

DALLETT: Yeah, it was wonderful, yes. Thank you. That's the

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end of side two of interview number 039.