

BOOK 22

IRVING ROSS

Interview with Irving Ross  
By Rodney Ross  
October 14, 1971  
(Time 1 and 1/2 hours.)

C O N T E N T S

<b>Emigration</b> from Lithuania . . . . .	1
Early Life in Hartford Wisconsin . . . . .	2
Garment Workers Union . . . . .	7
World War I Army Experience. . . . .	13
Employment at Hart, Schaffner, and Marx in Chicago . . .	15
Recollections of the Depression . . . . .	21
Experience as a Small Business Man . . . . .	24

Oral History Project

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Interview with Irving Ross

By Rodney A. Ross

October 14, 1971

R. Well, I was born, in fact the whole family was born in Kovno, Lithuania. Of course, our home was in Slabotka, the Jewish ghetto area on the outskirts of Kovno, but it's the same as Kovno. It was only the shopping district was in Kovno, you know. And then my father left in 1902. Within ten months he brought a brother over to the United States. Two years later he brought over his family, the wife and four children. Then another brother, Louis, went over.

It was awful hard for us to come here because my father was in the reserve, you know, in the Russian army. He served and he was still in the reserve when the war broke out between Russia and Japan. They ordered him to appear, so he was in this country already. He wouldn't come there to fight for them so we couldn't get a passport to come to the United States, so we had to smuggle the border.

My mother took an agent who would bribe appropriate officials and provide basic transportation arrangements. They make arrangements who you got to smuggle to take you over the border. From our town to Germany, if everything should go right, we should be there in a half hour. But it took us three days and three nights because in daytime we were hidden in the farmers' homes and night time we used to walk until we crossed the border. From there we crossed to Germany. We entered a town there. They call it Yatcun. And from there they took a wagon and took us a few miles, I don't know how many miles, and then we took a train. It took us to Bremen, Germany. We stood about three, four days waiting for a boat in Bremen to take us. It took fifteen days in the boat to cross the ocean.

I. Do you want to describe what the boat was like?

R. The boat was a real big boat; they used to call it Breslow. She was the first boat that sunk an American boat during the First World's War.

I. Was it a German crew then? It was a German boat, right?

R. Yes, it was a big boat, it was nothing fancy. Everybody slept together, that was in bunks. The women slept on the lower bunks and the boys, we used to be higher up. And on the boat they used to feed us bread, some kind of meat, a big herring. We didn't go hungry. Of course, I couldn't eat nothing: I was sick as soon as I got on. The first day as I got on I just smelled the water -- it got me. But all the others ate pretty good, I know my brother Meyer ate pretty good but I couldn't eat. I couldn't take the water. We landed in Baltimore and from Baltimore they put us on a train to Chicago, Chicago to Milwaukee. And then my father had a job in Hartford, Wisconsin.

I. Do you want to describe the Hartford situation?

R. In the factory in Milwaukee that my father (a tailor) worked for, he (the owner, a German) had about eighty or ninety people working for him. But the Chamber of Commerce from Hartford wanted to have a place for their children to work. So they came and gave the owner a proposition that they were going to build a shop for him -- free rent and they'll give him free power, everything just so the children, the girls and sons, could work in the shop. Of course, among the people who worked for him there must have been ten or twelve Jewish families and they moved along. They had homes for them, and we had

our home. My father worked there for five years.

I. How many people in the factory altogether?

R. There was in Milwaukee about seventy or eighty people I think.

I. About the same number there in Hartford?

R. Well, in Hartford, yes, but in Hartford not everybody wanted to go. In Hartford he hired girls that could do hand sewing and so on. They taught them how to work on the machines.

I. You said these were farmers coats they made?

R. They made big fur coats, overcoats, suits. They made everything. But, I wouldn't call that fancy tailoring. It was a cheaper line of work, you know.

Then my grandfather came over and he needed a little religion. So, he fixed up like a little synagogue in his home. When someone wanted to make a minyon (10 men needed for religious worship) to say kaddish (rememberance prayer for a deceased person) they used to come to his home. They used to let every Jew know that tomorrow we were going to have a memorial for something and they used to come.

I. Was there enough for a minyon there?

R. Oh yes, there were a few single fellows too. There were about ten or twelve families and then a couple of single fellows.

I. You said for your home it was like a six room ranch house?

R. A big farm house. They had homes for everybody. I don't know how in the heck they got the homes so fast. People must have lived

there before.

I. You said Hartford was about 3,000?

R. At that time. Now I looked at the map, it's about 6,000; but it was about 3,000 at that time. And of course, definitely you can't make no clothing with just farmers. You got to have a few mechanics, too, you know.

I. You said your father was a very good tailor?

R. Very good, yes.

I. What did you say he was making?

R. When we came he was already getting \$17 a week. And that was alot of money at that time. We paid \$7 a month rent and what the heck, everything was so darn cheap. You could have bought a pound of butter for 17 cents or less than that, eggs were twelve cents a dozen. Everything was cheap then. The few Jewish families Sunday used to go to the brewery order a little keg of beer and go out in the woods a block away from us, sit down and play cards. Oh they had a heck of a time in there, they had a good time.

I . Then you say your Grandfather came over about two years after.

R. No, about ten months after we were here.

I. He also worked as a tailor?

R. He used to be a tailor in his younger years -- a country tailor. You don't have to be fancy. But when he came over here he loved it. Of course he felt so independent, you know. Over there in

Europe him and your other grandfather (great grandfather) Raphael, they were gravediggers, you know.

I. You say though, your father as a tailor in Lithuania had gone from...

R. Oh, he was a good tailor. He was, even in Lithuania, a good tailor.

I. You said he went to various peasants' houses, farmers' houses?

R. See, my father was more of a city tailor. He didn't travel. But, when grandfather was young, that's all they were; that's how they lived out in the small towns, to sew for the farmers. They used to take the machine and sometimes you didn't have a machine. They used to by hand make it. That's how they worked.

I. What kind of clothes would they make in Russia?

R. Oh, you know, big fur sloppy coats. It was pretty cold there in winter. Yes, it was pretty cold in winter. Big fur coats and then he used to make suits too. But he worked mostly on the big heavy coats. Heavy clothes. They used to make pants also.

I. So, when you came to Hartford did you go to public school?

R. I went to school, yes.

I. And you said you had learned Yiddish in Lithuania in the Cheder?  
(rabbi operated elementary class)

R. In Lithuania I went to Cheder. Sure. I went to write Yiddish.

I. Did you have much trouble in the American school?

R. Well, I'll tell you where I had the trouble. When I came I couldn't talk. You see in the cities at that time immigration was pretty heavy. In the cities they had systems for immigrants to go to school. They used to take kids if they had a little knowledge from Europe, it used to take them a few weeks and they used to jump them up to non-graded classes. Like, if you were smart enough they'd push you right up to fourth or fifth grade. But in country towns they didn't have the system. When I started in school I used to do in Europe already long division, you know, I was pretty good in everything.

I. Had you learned that at the Cheder -- long division?

R. Oh, in Europe they called it a different name. I used to do adding; I was good in arithmetic. 12 year old boy you know. They put me in first grade because I couldn't talk English. A little girl they ask, "How much is one and two?" It took her about two minutes till she counted on her fingers one and two, she made out of it three. Then they ask her, "How much is two and one?" Again she didn't know. So I kept up a few words., Finally they used to put me in fourth grade when they'd come to arithmetic work. The rest they used to put me in first. So, I got so I couldn't take it. I went two years, I couldn't take it. I didn't want to go no more with those kids. But in the cities they had a good system. They had some pretty smart boys who used to go one, two years of school. But over there they didn't have the system. It was something new to them in the schools. To the teachers the Jewish people just come from the wilderness some place, they thought. So it was something different. In the city they knew it. But in the small town --

a Jewish kid had no business to go to a small town at that time from Europe.

I. So you said you were there for a couple of years in the school system?

R. Well, my father was there for a year before we. For we, altogether four years there. We came in 1904 and we moved out in 1908.

I. Where did you go when you moved out of Hartford? Was there any labor organization there?

R. Oh, that's what I was going to tell you. That's why we had to move. He made such lousy clothes over there, the manufacturer, that he needed a labor union so he could sell his clothes. That time unions started to jump up to organize. So he thought he'd take the labor to sell more clothes. But in a country town, every couple of months he had a strike there. Couldn't get the strikebreakers because it was a small town. So he suffered for five years and he went bankrupt. So all the people who worked there had to move out.

I. So you say his clothes weren't very good?

R. No, it was a cheap line of cloth. That doesn't make nothing to do with but, the labor -- everything -- it was no handwork. It was so so cheap, you could have bought a suit for five dollars at a time, six dollars. So they organized.

I. When you say they organized, what kind of union? Was this the Ladies, Garment Workers-Union?

- R. No, no at the time it was the Garment Workers, not the Ladies, the Garment Workers.
- I. Based in Milwaukee, or in Chicago, or in New York?
- R. The garment workers were all over the United States. Then the CIO knocked them out. That was in 1910.
- I. Wait, do you mean the AFL?
- R. The AFL-CIO. They organized and they knocked them out, those garment workers. A bunch of kooks they were, just kooks. That's all. So they knocked them out. In 1910 we first started the re-organization work. The reorganization work began in 1910.
- I. Had your father been active in the union?
- R. Well, no no. What active could he be? He paid his dues. I was an active member myself. I was secretary in 1910 when we start to organize in Milwaukee. I was secretary there in the union.
- I. What kind of organization was there? Was it garment workers?
- R. We organized everybody. We organized in the trade.
- I. Well, how did most of the people work? Were they in small factories or large things with several types of people?
- R. In Milwaukee there was just two factories that made clothing, Adler had over one hundred people working for them. But they all went out since, when the union came in, they all got scared. Adler closed up. But it was different trades on top. Different manufacturers.
- I. Was it mostly a Jewish union?

- R. Oh no, no it was mixed. It was mixed, yes. I was secretary in 1910.
- I. Were there any big strikes?
- R. Sure, in Chicago -- went out in 1910. Chicago organized the union. Chicago manufacturers used to send it to Milwaukee contractors to make the clothes, like scab workers you know. What do they call it to break the union -- yes, scabs, like. Contractors then to be organized and we stopped it. In 1910 the reorganization work started.
- I. Wait, you said you hadn't been working when you were in Hartford, right?
- R. Wait a minute, I worked in Hartford already. I quit going to school when I was just about 14 years old. I didn't want to go to school because they didn't want to give me the right schooling there so I quit. So my father says what can I do with you here? There's no other industry here. So he took me in the shop. They start me out with three and a half dollars a week. On the machine, by hand, I never wanted to learn. So I worked on the machine. That's how I became an operator on the machine. But if it weren't-to bring us in Milwaukee from Europe I would never have learned this trade. There was hundreds of different trades to learn for young fellows. But, what else could I do in Hartford? There was nothing else. Sure, I would have learned something else.
- I. So, you were a member of the union even there in Hartford?
- R. No, I was in no union. I was just 14 years old. I didn't even know the trade, just the certain thing they taught me how to do, that's all. No, I didn't belong to the union yet.

I. You say Dave was about two years younger than you?

R. Dave was six years younger. Then during the First World's War he enlisted when he was eighteen years old.

I. Did anyone else go into the needle work industry besides you?

R. Well, my brother Meyer could already sew from Europe. He was fourteen years old. In Europe they teach you a trade when you're ten years old. Maybe if my father left -- I was just about ten years old. But there they start to work at ten -- eleven years old.

I. So, Meyer was 3 or 4 years older than you?

R. Two years exactly. Two years and one day.

I. So Meyer went into the needle industry also?

R. Meyer they took into the shop right away.

I. And you?

R. And I went to school.

I. You went to school and then later on in Hartford.

R. In Hartford I didn't want to go to school. What could they do with me? They couldn't let me run around. There was no place to run, a small country town. So they took me in there.

I. What about David? Did he go in?

R. Dave, oh, Dave was a kid. So he went on to the army. And from the army Dave's done everything he never worked hard. He's done everything. I don't know where in the heck he learned all those

things. He was a window trimmer for Sears Roebuck in Milwaukee. He was advertising for them. I don't know where the hell he got the knowledge. I don't know. But he's done alot of things. Dave always didn't care to work too hard. Wages were terrible. You weren't . treated like a human being. Most naturally you wanted better conditions. Most naturally you didn't strike just for fun. You wanted to better yourself.

I. Well, were you striking for a 48 hour week?

R. 48 -- and more money, you know. And they should treat you like a human being. Why do people strike? They strike because they want to be out on the street?

I. In the factory were you paid by piecework?

R. Mostly the tailoring line is piecework. The whole tailoring line, it's section work. It isn't like you start out from the start. One makes some operations: 'they pay three cents or two cents or a nickel, it depends. Now it's entire, but years ago it was so split, the operations, and then they put the garment together. They start from the bottom to make a coat. One would make -- we'll say, an operation that would only pay a penny a piece, or two cents, and that's all. One would say, for example, if a man in a tailor shop put collars on, he'd stop only to stand -- and just put collars all day on. He didn't make the whole garment. And that's how they put the garment together. It was mostly all piecework unless -- they used to be good custom work when the tailor had to make a whole garment himself. It was different. But we had to make clothes, even now, it's made in section work.

- I. You had union meetings once a week or once a month?
- R. Oh yeah. Now the leaders are so sure with their job they don't need no meetings. You do whatever they tell you, that's all. It started with a sacrifice. It's not what I thought it was, you know. Of course it was better then. They looked at you before they had the power. But now the old timers are treated like dogs, even for the union leaders. Of course now they're trying to improve a little bit for the retirees. They're trying to improve a little bit. But old timers ain't got no say -- nothing.
- I. When you were organizing say in 1910, 1915 -- did you have weekly meetings or monthly meetings?
- R. At that time we had meetings, yeah. We used to have meetings, but what could we say? The way the leaders felt was right, it was right, that's all. In the beginning we had meetings whenever it was necessary. After everything was all set, we had them once a month.
- I. But how did they become leaders?
- R. Now they don't even have no meetings. The men with more knowledge and more brains were the leaders.
- I. Did they have elections then?
- R. What elections have they got? They used to have elections.
- I. No, I'm talking about what they used to do.
- R. They used to have elections, yes. But not now -- now a man's elected, it's just like Meany. Does Meany need elections? He's just at a job, you know. Or like Lewis was with the coal miners. Do they need elections? The same thing in this trade. It's more of a business proposition; it's like a business. Girls type -- type this.

It's a real business now. And there are leaders. Maybe they're more educated than we were. And they run the business, that's all. They got their own bank -- Amalgamated.

I. Wait, I'm still interested in what you were doing in 1910. Did you go out and talk with workers as secretary?

R. Why sure, you had to go out, picketing shops and try to talk to people that they should come to the union meeting-and become a member. Oh, sure we got to take shops down to strike.

I. When you talk about the union meetings -- what went on at these meetings?

R. What went on there? About how we should come together, what shop didn't pay enough, or what shop had to go down in strike. Well, you know, labor problems.

I. So you were with this for --

R. Well then, I was pretty active until 1917, till they took me in the army. And then when I came back from the army, they had somebody else got on to it. That time I went on to Chicago from Milwaukee.

I. What were your experiences with the army? Were you inducted there in Milwaukee?

R. I was drafted.

I. Where was the basic training?

R. In Louisville, Kentucky.

I. How many months of that? Or weeks?

R. I had three months basic training. Then they send me overseas.

I. To Paris, France?

R. I was in France, yes. I landed in Liverpool, England. From Liverpool I went to Winchester. That's England. Then from Winchester I went to another town that's on the ocean. Then we took the boat to take us to LeHavre. And then from LeHavre I was -- I forgot already what they call it -- a camp not far from the Spanish border. It was a camp -- very nice climate. I loved that climate. I'm telling you it was Southern France. You're not attached to any organization. And from there they used to pick out and send you to your permanent organization. So me, they sent to the 26th Division. They were stationed near Lyons, France.

I. Lyons?

R. Lyons, France. That's a nice city. Lyons. Or maybe they pronounce different. Something like that. So from there they send me to the 26th Division, the division from the New England states -- Massachusetts, Rhode Island. They attached me with them, so I went with them and I came home with them.

I. You got to France after the Armistice was declared or before?

R. I got in England. I was just two days in England. When I arrived there an armistice was signed. I thought they might send me back, but they still sent me in France; kept me six months in France.

I. What did you do during your six months duty?

R. Nothing. I didn't even know. Standing guard -- and what I was watching, I don't know. They put me once, honest to goodness, I never forgot it, in a little woods there. "Stand there, guard." What I was watching I don't know.

I. Was this in Lyons?

R. No it was outside in that warm climate. I'm telling you I was afraid to stand there by myself. They put me near a cemetery. They don't care. But you're not afraid when you're a soldier, you're not afraid.

I. Did you get to Paris?

R. No. I haven't been in Paris. I've been in different cities. I was in Bordeaux. That was near Bordeaux, that place. That's a beautiful town. Oh, the climate is wonderful, grapes all year round. I enjoyed it over there, the southern part of France. Very good climate.

I. So then you spent six months there and then were shipped back to the United States?

R. United States. I came back to Milwaukee. And then my brother Meyer already lived in Chicago. So he says, "What's the use of staying in Milwaukee. You come to Chicago." After the First World's War it became a real prosperity for tailors. Because boys used to come back from the war -- they needed clothes. And we got so busy. I come to visit him on one Sunday. He says, "Try tomorrow and you go over to Hart, Schaffner and Marx." He told me where to go. You know, I didn't know nothing in Chicago. I went over and I got a job with Hart, Schaffner and Marx. Week work job. You know I already

was a good pocket maker at that time. I got down and they hired me and they paid me \$48 a week. Oh, pretty good. And I used to put in every night over time till eight o'clock. It was already the union. So, that's how I met Dorothy, my wife, while I got my job I met her..

I. Was she working there?

R. No, she was a kid. I'm 12 years older than Dorothy.

I. How did you meet Dorothy?

R. Alright, I'll tell you. My brother Meyer lived across the street from her parents.

I. Where was this? On the West side?

R. On the West side, on Washburn Avenue. That's around 1700 west. That's near Damen Avenue, about two or three blocks from Damen Avenue, and near Roosevelt Road. It was all the Yiddishe neighborhood there. So they introduced me to her. I didn't know, she was a big girl. But if I had known she was that old. If I'd known she was that old I would never have started up. She wasn't quite 18 years I married her. And I was already a fellow close to 29 years. But we got engaged and so I made my home in Chicago. I'm twelve years older.

I. What did Dorothy's parents do? What did Dorothy's father do?

R. He was a tailor. That's how we had something in common. He was a tailor, my brother was a tailor. And years ago the Jewish used to be more together. Like on a nice warm day you all got on a corner

and stand and talk. You don't see it now no more, but years ago -- just like Swartzies (Negroes) stand on the corner and talk. That's how the Jewish people used to be. Stand on the corner and talk. So he introduced me to her father and I started coming up to her house. We lived across the street.

I. Once you got married did you live near Meyer?

R. No, I moved. That was a time. The new real up-coming neighborhood on St. Louis Avenue, that's 3500 West, near 18th Street. That was the new Jewish up-coming neighborhood, you see. So I moved over there.

I. And you continued working at Hart, Schaffner & Marx?

R. I worked at Hart, Schaffner about eighteen years.

I. Was it you who said you were working in a Turkish bath?

R. Well I'll tell you, by Hart, Schaffner I start to work for them in 1919. I start to work for them, and I must quit in '37 when I bought the counter in the bath house.

I. You bought the what?

R. Like a lunch room in the bath house -- a counter. That was in 1937, I think it was. Yeah, I worked for Hart Schaffner about eighteen years.

I. Where did you work for eighteen years?

R. By Hart, Schaffner and Marx.

I. Were there any major strikes?

R. Oh, not in those years. The strike was, settled. We didn't have much trouble with Hart, Schaffner & Marx. It was a big strike in 1910 -- a strike for about twenty weeks or so.

I. Were you involved in that.1910 strike?

R. In Milwaukee, not here.

I. In Milwaukee were you involved?

R. Yeah.

I. What was it over? Labor conditions?

R. Well, labor tried to organize. In 1910 they appointed me, I was secretary, 1910 and 1915, The real organization work was in 1915. But it started in 1910. I think I became involved in 1915 if I'm not mistaken, the second strike.

I. What was the second strike?

R. The same thing. You always have troubles, you know. In 1915 mostly the whole track was almost organized, the whole tailoring line.

I. And you say it was an especially Jewish union?

R. No -- only Jewish working tailor. You find Polish. In fact the big majority were Italians.

I. You didn't have anything to do with David Dubinsky's union?

R. Dubinsky, yes. He was my president in the International Ladies Garment Workers.

I. Wait, you said it was the Garment Workers Union.

R. No. Now that I retired from the trade a couple of years ago I tried for the Ladies. I told you on here, I changed. I worked all the time on men's tailoring. Then I went in business -- in the bath house I went. I was about ten years out of the trade. When I sold my business I wanted to go back so I saw a friend who told me, "I'll take you up to the Ladies Garment."

I. No, my question was, you had said in 1910 it was just the Garment Worker's Union. It wasn't "ladies," it wasn't "men's," it was just called the Garment Workers...

R. No, it was always two unions. But they were together. It was always together. I don't know how all of a sudden they got mixed up to be separate.

I. Oh, you mean it was only after...

R. When we first started to organize we understood the needle trade; we always used to say, "the needle trade." It didn't make no difference then. But then they started separating -- ladies garment, men's garment, you know. But we always thought it was needle trade.

I. Oh, so you say it's about 1910 and you're in Milwaukee.

R. In 1910 I was in Milwaukee, yes. I worked in the tailor shops.

I. And you said you were secretary to...

R. I was secretary to the union that started to organize in 1910.

I. It was just called the Garment Workers Union?

R. The Garment Workers Union.

I. No distinguishing between Men's or Ladies Garment workers?

R. Now there is. When we start to organize, to us it didn't make no difference. We knew we got to organize the needle trade. But now them son-of-a-guns. The International Ladies Garment and Amalgamated, they're like two different unions. Suppose like pension now, they pay. You know you got to be twenty years a member to collect your pension. You can't belong to the union twenty years. You got to work steady twenty years because the employer pays toward the pension. If you just belong and pay dues it doesn't mean nothing. You got to put in twenty years labor. If anybody worked five years in the business, they don't recognize it. Two different unions. The reason I had a job myself to collect -- I had an awful hard job. Because they said I ain't got enough time. But I wrote them a letter. I put on my daughter, you know, and I said when I tried to organize in Milwaukee, to us it didn't make no difference whether they worked by ladies or men. We felt we got to organize the needle trade. It didn't make no difference to us where you worked. But now both are separate. The Amalgamated don't recognize the International Ladies Garment and the International Ladies don't recognize the Amalgamated. I had a job -- but they gave me anyway. They were looking for two years from me. I didn't work because I worked all the time by males, but then I went for myself. When I sold my business I came back. But I didn't go back to theirs. I had a friend who took me up, who said you go to the Ladies (trade) now. So I put up with the Ladies. They figured out that I need two more-years because I was sick and didn't report. Then they send me the letter to explain you're

looking for two more years. I put my whole life in the needle trade. Well, I quite Hart, Schaffner and Marx in 1937.

I. How did the depression affect you? Were you very hard hit by the depression?

R. Oh yes. Oh, God yes!

I. Did Hart, Schaffner and Marx lay off?

R. There were times one week I made 78 cents by Hart, Schaffner and Marx.

I. Piece work?

R. In one week I made 78 cents. It was so slack that I made 78 cents. It struck me real hard -- real hard.

I. When did hard times start? Do you remember?

R. Sure, it started in 1929. I went through hell 1929-30, I went through hell. That's all. At that time my younger girl was about five years and she wanted a pair of shoes for a certain holiday. And I didn't have the dollar to buy the pair of shoes. I had to borrow a dollar from a neighbor and I went in Grant's department store and bought a pair of shoes for a dollar.

I. So you were telling me about the depression.

R. The depression was bad. I got through hell. So my brother Meyer and his son bought a grocery store in Englewood. That's around 63rd St. and he gave us a proposition that Dorothy should help working and she can help herself with groceries. So we fell for it. But it didn't work out right, you know. She couldn't get along.

He got married and she couldn't get along. So we remained to live in Englewood. I still worked and struggled till Dorothy got herself a job. Dorothy worked for a few years. But then we got along pretty good. And then in 1937 I had an opportunity. Her uncle owned a bath house on Kedzie Avenue, big bathhouse. He sold it to me, the lunch counter there, like a little lunch room in the bathhouse. There I made a good living. I made a few dollars. There your Zadie (grandfather) used to help me. He used to help me.

I. You had told me about it once before.

R. Did I tell you? So there I was seven years over there in the bathhouse.

I. Was he the only one who helped you as a worker?

R. Well, he was the only one. I used to have a little Italian fellow used to help me. Then Ladies Days, Wednesday, she would work. And her sister and mother used to help her. It was nice.

I. What kind of foods did you have?

R. A lot of herring. In a bathhouse you eat a lot of herring. I used to sell as high as about 100 pounds of herring a week. We used to pickle our own herring. Dorothy used to make gefilte fish. Like a little lunchroom we made a pretty good buck. I made a good living.

I. Was it a mikva (religious bath)? Or an all Jewish bathhouse?

R. No -- Russians, Polish, every nationality was there, you know. We used to have stones and you pour water and the steam comes out from the stones. That's Russian -- Finnish. In Finland they have those

bathhouses . We used to have a big trade on that.

I. How many people would come in? Would it be like a Saturday afternoon? Sunday?

R. On Friday -- I had Friday. Those three days, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I put in I would say, six or seven hours sleep. Work almost straight through. Awful big you know, those three days I made a pretty good buck over there in the bathhouse. But then I got sick, I couldn't take it. You see the bathhouse was built pretty bad. The lunch room was built right above the hot room. And I had a little asthma: I couldn't take it but I stood it about seven years anyhow. I made a good living there, I saved a few dollars. That was pretty good.

I. When you had been working at Hart, Schaffner and Marx before you went into the lunch counter -- was this a downtown factory?

R. They had about four or five factories and worked in all of them. They used to send me up to help them, you know.

I. What kind of jobs did you do?

R. I was like an operator, pocket maker -- make pockets. You know I was a pretty good operator on the machine.

I. Were you still active in the union for this period?

R. No, not now. Now I'm retired.

I. No, I mean for the period during the 1920's --1930's.

R. No, That's the reason I left Milwaukee. When I got back from the

army and somebody took it over, I came to Chicago and my brother Meyer said look around. So I get a good job at Hart, Schaffner and Marx and I liked it. But then it got into 1929; I start for Hart, Schaffner and Marx in 1919. But the depression got in, in 1929-30, and it killed me, you know. But I had a good job there a few years.

I. So after you left the bathhouse, what did you do?

R. 1937 -- After I left the house. The bathhouse I left during the Korean War when Roosevelt was President.

I. Do you mean World War II?

R. World War II. I bought a grocery store on Cottage and 49th. So I stood there three years -- from '44 to '46, something like that.

I. How did you find World War II affecting you? Did it have much effect?

R. Well, at that time...

I. Were your daughters married yet?

R. Yeah. They both got married while I was in the grocery store. You're right.

I. Did either of your son-in-laws fight during World War II?

R. They were both in the army. They were both overseas.

I. Where did your daughters stay then when they were overseas?

R. They lived with me, sure.

I. They lived with you there. Was it still Englewood you were living in?

R. In Englewood and at Sacramento Boulevard. Yes, they lived with me. at Englewood. Surely. Yeah, Idelle graduated high school there in Englewood High School. Her daughter teaches the school now.

I. Did you have many government regulations for operating the grocery store during World War II?

R. Yes, I had it when I had the grocery store.

I. What kind of things did the government do?

R. I couldn't get nothing. You see I bought the store in a bad time. My brother, he had a store, but he had for years where he could get meat. But I couldn't get no meat. I was a new man in that line. And if I could have got meat I would have made a good living. But I couldn't get a hold of the meat. I could have made a nice few dollars if I would have had some kind of -- how do you say-- you know, people to give me meat. I didn't know. So I had it for three years and I didn't like that line. I didn't like it. So a customer happened to come along. I sold him the store. And Dorothy says, "Let's not go in business now. Find yourself a job and for awhile we'll look where we can get something else." So a man takes me out to learn the ladies garments. So that's how I worked by ladies garments. I put in 20 years at the ladies garments till I retired now.

What else can I tell you? Well, that's all -- that almost everybody went through this life during the depression. Everybody.. You see, people, like some fellows that I worked with by Hart,

Schaffner, and Marx, most of them were tailors. They were operators. But they gave up tailoring and they became operators because an operator makes more money than tailors. If you didn't have no work, they used to run downtown, get a job in a store, alteration department in a store. Always used to make a few dollars. But I was different, I suffered. I couldn't sew by hand. I was never a tailor. That's all I could do was on the machine. Where could you get a job just on the machine? You got to be a tailor. And there I made a mistake. My father always used to say, If you like this trade learn everything. Don't be no half mechanic." He says, "You got to learn everything So then when I made a mistake, thank God it worked out pretty good. It's alright.