H: Tell me about how you came over from Russia.

J: How I came from Russia? I came with Teddy Roosevelt on the same boat, that’s the truth.

H: Yeah I know you did, I believe you. What. . .what was your father. . .why did you come over?

J: Why did I come over? [*Garbled]*. . . My father, should rest in peace, [*garbled, possibly asking for a drink]* My father, how should I put it, New York State, you understand?

H: Mmhm

J: From New York you got Philadelphia, all different states.

H: Mmhm

J: We came. . . you should know that.

H: Yeah.

J: Vilna. V-I-L-N-A. Vilna Governate, that’s a state you understand?

H: Yeah

J: But, my father didn’t live in Vilna, that’s a big city. So he lived in a small town. Lida. L-I-D-A. Now in Lida was gymnasia, a school, we had to go and pay money to go to school there, see? But my father didn’t live there. He was a guy didn’t believe in eh, giving money away, and he lived in a small town like [*garbled]* see?

H: What was—

J: Called Vaverka.

H: Oh.

J: In order, Lida is a city. He didn’t live there; he lived on the outskirts. Now the outskirts when he got there they wouldn’t let him s—. . .So my father was a wealthy man. And he had a wife. . .and he had fourteen or fifteen kids with her. He had a big farm, and he would get up in the morning with a big pipe, smoke and watch how they worked, you understand?

H: Mmhm

J: Twenty rooms. A lota maids. All he did is [*garbled*] they never, they never slept, my mother and father never slept together you understand?

H: Mmhm.

J: So how the hell—

H: So how’d they have kids?

J: That’s what I’m saying. But they have kids, they got lost, they have kids. Now in order to have the kids [*clears throat*]. He didn’t believe in giving money. When you reach the age of eighteen you had to go to the service you understand? If you didn’t go to the service, when you came due. . . the government called you and there was a penalty of one thousand rubles, that’s a thousand dollar fine. So my father says to hell with you, I don’t give no fines, I’ll just go and get away, figure it out.

H: Send you here.

J: Eh?

H: Did he send you here?

J: Send me, how did he send me here?

H: So the women didn’t have to go into the army did they?

J: No.

H: So it was—

J: Wait a minute wait a minute. So in other words, from the first wife he had fourteen or fifteen kids I don’t know. Thirteen kids. There was no such thing as a doctor, they didn’t know to call him. You had to go to [*garbled*] and [*garbled*]. So, when the boys were born, they had no father. He didn’t register the boys, you understand? Girls he registered. Boys, he didn’t have any boys. So he kept the boys until they became about [mitzvah?] you understand? About thirteen years of age. At fourteen, go to America. They don’t have no father you understand? They went. How do you go? You have to cross the border between Poland and Germany. So you send ‘em away, you pay so much money and you cross. And you don’t pay the penalty.

H: And they just let you cross, go across, the officials?

J: They don’t let you, you see, you pay’em, in dem years fifty-five rubles, is fifty-five dollars. Delivers you. . .from there to New York or Boston or wherever you go. But, how do you cross over the border? So comes along a guy like and he says to you I’ll get you over the border, you understand? So he puts you on a train, and you travel, a day and a half, and you [*garbled*] a station. When you [*garbled*] a station they tell you, the father says look there’s a man going to smoke a pipe or whatever, he’ll come over, that’s the man. So you get off at the station, and the guys walks, you Joe Perlman? Yes. Follow me. You understand? He gets paid for it. It [*garbled*] the border, you understand? And you [*garbled*] over, in other words you cross a line, and I get into Berlin, Germany. Berlin. We come from Lida. Berlin, Germany is a distance away. Warsaw. You ever hear of Warsaw?

H: Yeah

J: My mother’s brothers were very intelligent, educated, see? They wouldn’t get married on account of they wanted to make sure the folks was taken care of. They didn’t want to get married. So one worked in Warsaw, very educated, in charge of a dish factory, see? The other guy gotta job in Berlin, Germany. A big man. And he had a daughter and the daughter worked in a bank. You understand? Now [*garbled*] and then one guy was a dentist, the dentist was a city called Białystok. He opened up [*garbled*] and studied dentistry. [*Garbled* Legitimate?] see? And I go and I get me in, the guy picks me up, he got paid, and he got me on a train and we get into Berlin. Didn’t no from no Warsaw, Berlin is my first step. Take a look he says, over here, you’re going to have to stay a week til they get a boat for America, you understand? You gotta wait here he says. Come outta the train and look around, you didn’t go to no seat or no place you just wait. And you take twenty-five rubles, twenty-five dollars with you, to show ‘em that you have money to get to the states. And I sit and I see a beautiful city, I never knew my mother’s brother, I knew there was somebody there, he used to come to Lida to see mother once and a while I never saw him.

H: Was that your father, your father married twice didn’t he, he had two wives?

J: Well yeah sure how the hell would he had so many kids?

H: So how many kids did he have altogether?

J: Altogether there was twenty-seven children but get this, now, I stayed in Berlin, they put me in and I stayed a week there you see?And then they, you go out and you eat and you drink and I loved it what the hell do I care? And I get to, to take the boat, and before I go to take the boat, they examine you. And they examine they said to me—it’s a paid up job they knew I’m kosher you know what I mean?—you can’t go, why?, you got [*garbled*] what’s [*garbled*]? My eyes are not good. So what do I do now? Got to go to a doctor. So you’re there, and you pay off and [*garbled*]. I stay a week you go out in the morning you eat you drink and I ship to America. And I get into America, New York City.

H: Did you go to Ellis Island?

J: Eh?

H: Ellis Island?

J: Everybody landed to Ellis Island you couldn’t get in otherwise.

H: What was it like?

J: So now you have to show the twenty five doll—rubles. Where you going? Where am I gonna go to? These kids from the first wife went to Trenton, New Jersey you understand? I never knew ‘em, they went before I was born. One son I remember, I was three years old, he come in he says I’m leaving [*garbled see the world?*] gone. He gave me a kiss and he went. And there was a sister, now this sister was to me better than a mother, a step-sister, I was born, had asthma see? Excuse me for the [*garbled*] Who ever knew of a doctor then? And there was a church, my father was, had a big business, and all I did, ha, he had cows, [*garbled*], pigs, everything. There was no refrigeration, the refrigeration there was a basement, see? The basement was so cold it freezes your stuff.So we had a lotta pigs, when we’d kill the pigs and all the, a lot of the stuff I used to see the [*garbled*] it got me sick to my stomach they eat all kind of crap, one side the non kosher stuff, the other side he’d store away kosher stuff, see? And it was wonderful. So when I get to New York, so I travel on the boat, and they said uh, everybody get up, Sunday morning the President is gonna talk, what the hell do I know about a President I’d never heard of a President I didn’t know nothin’. Here you educate children. I was never told about those things, nothing.

H: Did you go to school when you were little?

J: Hmm?

H: Did you go to school?

J: I just told you. Lida’s a big city. My father didn’t send me to Lida because—

H: So you didn’t go to school at all?

J: No you had to, you had to have money.

H: Oh okay.

J: Now, what do you do my father, we were three Jewish [*garbled families?*]. Five miles away from us was a great big gentile millionaire, a rich guy see? And if he wanted to get laid and so on, you understand the big boss?

H: Mmhm

J: He’d run into a big city like Warsaw, stay away a week and get fixed up, I’m just telling you, see? He’s a big man, and he controlled around there a lot of [*garbled*], so, one of the neighbors lived, two blocks away from him, see? We lived, in a small place, and people couldn’t make [*garbled name of place*] they had to stop either at my father’s place or across the street, stay overnight and then they made it see? They said the President is gonna speak. Alright. I get out of bed I don’t know any President I don’t speak no English, at home I never worked I was fourteen years old, all I did is whip butter, you know how they make butter, pick up chicken legs and eat, and drink. My sister was like a mother to me, my step, wonderful.

H: What happened to your. . . was your real mother still alive?

J: Yeah sure.

H: Oh okay.

J: They were in Europe. So finally I landed to America. I landed to America and now you put this in your mind. (pause) I came here world war number one. See? With Teddy Roosevelt on the same boat. What year was that?

H: That’s about 19. . .15. 1916 around then. Maybe earlier, a little earlier. How old were you?

J: My age. . .when I came to the states I learned to drive a [*garbled*] an old piece of car. [*garbled*] They made a mistake. They made a mistake on the license I was a year older I says what the hell what do I give a damn you understand? In reality I’m now eighty four years old see? But I’m really eighty three years old, a year younger because they made a mistake and so what the hell did I give a damn it’s the day that matters you understand?

H: How old were you when you first came over here?

J: [*garbled*] bar mitzvah

H: Oh so you were fourteen.

J: I was fifteen or sixteen years old. [*garbled*] So when I landed to New York where am I going to go to Trenton? I don’t know nobody, you understand? They didn’t know me they left before. And this, his name is, [*garbled* Sam Perlman?] and he came here with an old man. I had a cousin [*garbled*] an old man, he came here and [Perlmans?] came they landed to Trenton, New Jersey. Now my brother, my step-brother landed in Trenton, and he went to work, I don’t know what he did, but he wasn’t [*blank*] working you understand? He was an enemy to labor. I guess he was smart. And he went to school, and finally he found a girl and he got married. He found a girl and got married and he lived in Trenton, New Jersey. I go to America my father says I gotta kid in Trenton, what the, I didn’t know ‘em they left before I was born. Now this sister of mine see, the step-sister, she left, and she says here take ten kopeck she give, me ten cents, go drink milk and drink [*garbled haze?*] you see I was sickly, I used to be in bed in the winter a lot of times, and she left for America. So when I come here, get to the [*garbled guard?*] and show the twenty five rubles and I land what the hell am I going to stop Trenton I don’t know nobody they left before I was born. And I land in Boston. I land in Boston. I never worked in my life, I never knew what a n\*gger was I never knew what a, a, I’m a Jew you understand, we had pollacks, everybody, and I go to look, and they said to me oh you [*garbled*] this and this place, North Margin Street I mark it I get there, when I get there I look for an apartment, cheap neighborhoods see? And it says uh, let’s see, [*garbled*] a block away. And I get there, and I find a cheap neighborhood, and there’s a street called Salem Street, and I ring the bell and my step sister opens the door she says oh come in she’s so tickled she says come in. Took me in she says, I got married, my husband is a kosher butcher. You understand?

H: What was her name?

J: Resnick.

H: What was her first name?

J: Lisa [I think he says Lisa]. And he is a kosher butcher. And he’s got a store on the Salem Street—a busy street, a lotta offices across the street, and she says—

H: Is that Dan’s grandmother?

J: Huh?

H: Is that Dan Resnick’s grandmother and grandfather?

J: No that’s my mother’s, are you listening, its from the first wife.

H: But is it, is it—

J: My mother.

H: What were their children’s, did they have children? Your sister?

J: The sister?

H: Yeah.

J: Yes. Uh, Sidney Resnick.

H: Right that’s [*garbled*] that’s Dan Resnick’s father, Sidney. Okay go on.

J: So when I came here she says I married a Jewish butcher, you heard that? And then, I got a baby. See? Who’s the baby? A little girl, see? So I looked at the little baby and I always liked kids and I had nothing to do, so my [*garbled*] had kosher meat market. He was a goddamn good [*garbled*] every night he’d come home, every night in the week, all he ate was rice soup or milk soup see, poor, no, no money. Friday when he closed up whatever meats was left, he was strictly kosher, he’d bring home, you’d understand, and we’d eat. So he says, here let Joe sleep here, he was a good guy, took a mattress, put it on the floor for me in the dining room and I slept. He was good to me you understand? Money he didn’t have. I took the kid you know, the little girl he had, and I went out [*garbled*], and what the hell do I know a lot a [*garbled*] and I see a basement I never saw it and I go down a basement a fountain they sell drinks and so on, I’m holding [*garbled*] on my hand, and she sits down, she was four months old, and I order a soda, which was a penny a soda, three cents for ice cream, and I’m sitting and the kid gets all of a hot bite with her hand she gets burned and she screams, she didn’t know nothing you understand and I didn’t know nothing. And I get up and I walk with her, and I walk out and I come into the house and my sister says what did you do I says gee I didn’t do nothing. What happened? I don’t know I didn’t know. We went to the store, the guy says I don’t know, she was sittin’ here and she saw the pipes, and the kid got a hold of the pipe and burned her hand. And my sister, my step-sister was good to me, so she says to me I’ll tell you what Joe, you came from Europe, it’s a lousy town, and she says conditions is tough here. I don’t want to see [*garbled*] work and you feed me, I gotta get a job. She says you don’t want no job, you go to night school and get educated you understand? She was so good to me. And she sends me to night school, I was just in this country about. . .two months.

H: Where’d you learn to speak English?

J: I’m trying to tell you. Little by little I picked up a few words and I go to night school so a fellow by the name of Stone should rest in peace, he was a Jewish teacher, a Zionist you understand? The first zionist in the world. And I sit at night, and they teach and teach and I was knocked out from the [*garbled*] and everything you understand? And after I got [*garbled*] lessons he came to me says how you doing? I says I don’t know, so [*garbled*] say gee I don’t know what’s a matter with the boy he comes in we give the lessons and he always sleeps, do you understand? I didn’t do the work. And he was the first zionist so, she says Joe, I says look Lizzie, my mind is not at it, in Europe I never worked, I fall asleep, lemme go to work, she says you don’t wanna work, I says yes I do wanna work, she says well, how do I get a job, she says, the way you get a job here, you take a Jewish paper, I didn’t even, in Europe my father used to hire a Jewish rabbi see, for five kids, and he’d keep him, pay the rabbi so much a year, and he would teach us Jewish, you understand, ha, that rabbi was so knocked out, he was teaching us, and he’d fall asleep you understand we were young kids, we’d [*garbled*] so he says to my father what’s the matter, and I said I tell ya you’re giving us a rabbi and he’s always asleep, you understand? To make this story short, I uh, went looking for a job, it says apply in here, the guy made a mistake by being born, of course conditions is tough, his name is Fein a Jewishman but those things you don’t forget, and I get there in the morning and of course I’m there, a chinaman used to rent shirts, wore a shirt with a tie, the chinamen would charge you one cent to wash a shirt you understand conditions were tough, and I says I’ll [*garbled*], the guy says you ever work? I says I never worked in my life. Come on in. Shows me the store, the size of his grocer was I’d say like from here to the porch. You walk in he says, I says I never worked show me, he shows me around, and he says, walk in two steps, here’s a kitchen, here’s a toilet here’s a bedroom, and he says. . .and I was shy I was a goddamn [*garbled*] in Europe I used to [*garbled*] away. Give you fifty cents a week board and room, fifty cents a week board and room. I wanted to work so, I go to work. I walk in, he shows me, see he’s got three kids, so in the bedroom, of course conditions are lousy, he had two cribs for the kids and the third one slept between the ladies and the mother you understand? I said where do I sleep? He says don’t worry you’ll sleep, conditions was tough, I never forget it, put a mattress on the floor and that’s where I sleep. He says you get fifty cents a week board and room and I’ll give you good hours. We deliver bagel and rolls like, one bread and two bagel, this and this, one means the first floor, two is the second floor, three the third. He says you never worked? I says no he says look watch me, so he says six o’clock we starting making up the baskets, then you take, watch me, you follow me, then you take a basket, like this, and follow me, and he takes, and we walk, first floor, second, you throw the bags see?

H: Throw them up to them?

J: Huh?

H: Just throw them up to the window?

J: Not on the window look, when you op— you go to this building its on the first floor we got ten bags you understand? You just throw the bag. Two bagel or two rolls in ‘em, and half a pumpernickel bread. Butter. But no more. . .now it takes two hours to, now I have to make up the bags, he says, I come here at six, sonofabitch comes in he says boy get up, six thirty, I get up and I wipe my eyes and I’m coughin’ like hell, get in the store its five o’clock, he says five o’clock you make up the bags and you go. One means the first floor two is second, you throw, you throw it in. I get to it he says you’re doing fine, now he says, when you get finished, it was about eight thirty nine o’clock, he says now look around the come in, in the kitchen, we’ll go and give you something to eat, that dirty dog he takes—of course conditions was tough it’s true—he takes a coffee, I never drank coffee in my life, he give me coffee I says we don’t drink coffee, I’ll give you milk, sonofabitch takes a quart and pours me in a glass a milk and takes the rest away, see, takes a piece of bread and butter, smears it over butter, everything he puts back, and I was shy and I was bashful, in Europe I used to throw this stuff away. As you get finished you come in, so I get finished, I was hungry, and I go in the toilet see they used to buy ice, so I go in, when he walks out I run in the ice chest see, and there’s an ice box. I open up I put something in this pocket in this pocket out of shame you understand, and then I go in the goddamn toilet and I close the toilet and I says I’m going to have a picnic, I was hungry, I pull out, stick in my mouth a tomato, I’m eighty three years old I still don’t eat tomatoes I hate ‘em. I took the tomato out and I spit it out. Pull this out, I stick in my mouth, it’s hard, I pull out, a skin, I pull the skin its a banana, you understand? I eat the goddamn banana.

H: Did you put the whole thing in your mouth?

J: Not with the skin, the skin I threw away. And then I says, to hell with him. So, when we get finished I sleep on the floor fifty cents a week. My sister didn’t want me to work for him, for anybody, and uh, he says, I’ll let, I’ll give you half a day off, Sunday I’ll let you go off at twelve o’clock, and you can go and visit your sister and do whatever you like but you gotta be in early in the morning. Took me three hours to get to my sister, trolly car, this. . .So I get to my sister’s. Well do you like the job? I says, yeah. And uh, I get fifty cents a week. Well, she says, you wanted to work I didn’t want you. And I get through eating, and started talking to my brother in law. Haha I laid down and I sleep for five hours you understand? Said she’d wake me up to have dinner. I had dinner and I said let me go, I got to make a bus to get to work you understand? Was tough times. So, then I go out to [*garbled live? livah?*] she says go take orders, and I like a damn fool I didn’t know what it meant, in Europe I never heard of—I come down good morning Mrs. Slotkin, you want some? Oh yes gimme a pound of butter, give this, we had good customers. I says don’t you want any coal or choc? Oh yeah gimme two bags of coal and a bag of chocolate. I never knew what a goddamn thing was, you understand? I’d take orders. Guy comes back says gee you’re doing a wonderful job. Now you’re making up the orders. After you make up you have a pushcart see? You load in ya, ya go and ya deliver. Well bagels rolls, I used to throw in, I can’t throw coal you understand? I had to take the goddamn coal and carry it on the third floor. With asthma you understand? Sick as a dog.

Then I says jesus its a tough life. I undertook it, I’ll do it fifty cents a week. I worked there seven weeks. And I come back, my sister says, well how do you like the job, you still get fifty cents a week? I says yes. She says, you’re foolish, why don’t you ask him to give you at least a dollar a week? I says well I’ll ask him if you’ll tell me. She says, I didn’t want you to work. *[sound of ice filled glass set down on table]* I come back, Monday morning I come in I says, I wanna talk to you Mr. Fein. He says, this is no time to talk, let’s first deliver the breakfast and this and we’ll talk later. Go an deliver and bring the orders, everything, and I get finished he says what is it? I says, we’ll talk lunchtime, I go eat lunchtime he says what is it? I said look, I’ve been with now eight to ten weeks, fifty cents a week I think I’m entitled to get a dollar a week. He says to me, all the foreigners, they got nothing to eat, as soon as they get in right away they want more money. He says wonderful, you’ll get it, I’ll give you a dollar a week. Yeah. So I work Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. . .Wednesday afternoon he says, I want to see you boy. I says what’s a matter? I promised you a dollar a week you’re getting it, business is bad here’s fifty cents and I’m laying you off, you understand?

H: Mhmhm.

J: Sonofabitch. He lays me off. I says to hell with him in the morning I’ll go look for a job. I go by in the morning, he’s got two new guys, see the doors were wide open you understand? What the hell am I gonna look at I can’t get a job, so I come back and I says to my sister, Lizzie, I think America is not for me. And that woman was to me better than a mother, she says I told you not to get a job, she says I’ll tell you what. Let me go out and see if I can get you a job. So she goes out, she says, tell you what, there’s so many stores around here, here’s twenty five cents go out to Scollay Square, its a square, they had amusement machines, and they had a theater there, eh, I never saw a theater, and girls would dance and sing and then they’d open up the breast, I never saw it you understand? And she gives me to go look for a job. [*garbled*] I go and [*garbled*] twenty five cents, I by me a coke for a penny and stand looking, they have these little pictures [*garbled*], and then fifteen cents I go in, upstairs, third floor because, and I’d see the movie you know? I mean a show, and girls see to me it was novelty see, and I’d come back, my sister says well, I says I don’t know can’t find a job, it’s too tough. She says, you mean you can’t find a, I never went looking see? So she says let me see. So she goes out, and she walks by a street Canal Street called [*Lean*?] Umbrella Factories, see they make umbrellas. She goes up, my sister’s a European woman, and she goes up the stairs on the second floor, and the guy looks, she says, [sound of hand smacking table] for godsakes what are you doing here? He comes from the same town where my sister comes from you understand? Lida from Russia. She says I got a brother and he wants a job. Well she says if you have a brother and he’s your brother, send me over and I’ll talk to him. [*garbled*] says here’s the room, a room like an executive office, [*sound cuts out*]

 Another daughter was making the umbrellas. I go up there and he says tell you what, [*garbled*] your sister’s my friend, see this girl here its my daughter, she makes the frames. Sit down she’ll show you, I think you should be able to pick it up, she’s one of the best in Boston. Work with her. Okay. My sister goes away and thanks him, [*garbled*] the girl sits and makes umbrellas, I’m a young fella I never worked in my life. Put up the frame you understand? And I worked the damn day all day long, and I feel fine. Didn’t have to work no eight to twenty hours, you come in at eight in the morning you go home at six. An hour for lunch. He says to me, I’d like to see you, in the morning when I come in he says, before you go home I want to see you today. I says to myself well, I guess I’m fired. I’m no good. [*Finkelstein?*] He says, you’re a terrific man, you did work that you put out as fast as my daughter. Where the hell’d you ever pick that up? I says, I don’t know. He says and I know your sister. I can get’em for less. We going to give you thirty five dollars a week.

H: That’s a big raise.

J: Jesus christ.

H: From the grocery store.

J: So, I come back. Come in like a doctor, and I make the frames, I’m wonderful. And finally I worked a month, and they give me a raise, they give me forty dollars a week, I never heard of it, you understand? I worked for fifty cents a week. I come in on a Saturday when everything was closed, only the son came in to take orders if somebody wants umbrellas on a rainy day, and I’d come in and be with him. Didn’t make the umbrellas. I’d come in and it pours like hell. And he gets a call and he says [*garbled Ulins?*] Department Store is calling, I need three umbrellas right away. I says don’t worry what kind? This and this. Three mens and two ladies. Send it right over. Makes up the five umbrellas, he says here, Joe, deliver it to [*garbled*] and Salem Street to [Ulins?]. I says who are you talking to? You. I’m not a delivery boy I’m supposed to—he says look, they just called up you got to deliver it, I’m giving you good money. I says I don’t have to. You don’t have to? I lay you off. Okay. I’m not going to walk into the rain. And he lays me off. I get back and I tell my sister. She says my god what’d you do? I got you—I says Lizzie I’m sick and tired, and I can’t stand it, I wanna go back to Europe. How you going to go back? I saved up a lot of money. Ha. I worked for that lousy grocer I had five dollars saved up you understand? And my brotherinlaw says [*garbled he didn’t have the m—?*] he wants to go back, send him back. So she says [Harry?] what are we going to use for money? He says look I’ll go [*garbled*] across the street to the ticket office, it’s fifty five rubles, I’ll send him back, they’ll trust me, when he gets home the father will send the money, you understand? And that’s what it was, he went in and bought me a ticket, and the boat is leaving on Tuesdays, see, and I’m so thrilled I was disgusted to work there like a dog, and I start packing my baggage, and the boat leaves, Charleston, in Boston, on a Tuesday noon. And Monday morning the bell rings. Mr. Perlman here? Yes. My sister says what is it? We’d like to talk to him. Well, she says alright. She says uh, you go right out they want to talk to you. And [Al Finkelstein?] was there, the guy that laid me off. He says Mr. Perlman, I’m sorry there was a little misunderstanding between you and I, and we want you to come back. I says look, it isn’t a question, I liked your job, I didn’t feel like working, I didn’t like the way you were talking, I can’t go back. Why? I says, I’m all packed. Here’s my baggage, I’m leaving tomorrow afternoon, I’m going back to Europe. How much did it take you we’ll pay for the ticket and we’ll give you fifty a week. And I says to myself, I didn’t tell him, to hell, I says Mr. Finkelstein its too late I decided I want to go back.

And I got on the goddamn boat on Tuesday, he wanted to give me fifty a week and I wouldn’t stay already, I had no work in Europe. And I get on the boat, and I get home. Now when I get home, they don’t let me off in Lida, say I got to go to [*garbled*] here, there. So finally, the drive me home and I says, stop, see, my father’s place was a night stop over another place. But uh, I didn’t tell ‘em. So I get in, all dressed up and Americanized, and I sit down, and I don’t tell him who I am and he didn’t expect me back you understand? [*garbled*] dolled up. And I says uh, he says what is it you want? I says I don’t know I’ll have a couple eggs, butter and coffee. . .

H: Is this your father?

J: Yeah.

H: He didn’t recognize you?

J: I was away for two years, you know, you grow up, and I wore [*garbled*] and he didn’t expect me back, how would he—so finally I says, where do you come? I says, I come from America. Oh my god what part of America. I says Boston Mass. My god, my daughter lives there, see? Elize (eh-LEEZ-y), that’s, and I says that’s me, and he says for crying out, what made you come back? I said I don’t want to stay there I came back. And I wanna tell her, people in Europe, they stunk, they were no good. Your mother, your father should rest, or anybody, you take now the kids, you take a kid when he’s, she’s twelve years old, you tell her intercourse, she knows what it’s all about you understand? When you go swimming with the girls and you give em a lay you got to tell ‘em, wear a rubber and be careful, no I mean you explain things. In Europe they don’t tell you these things. I didn’t know a goddamn thing. So my old man was mad I came back, he says you’ll break me. So now they go to work and send a letter to my sister, she was a year older and I had a sister a year, two years younger, the one who’s here now. And they write a letter, she should come. She was in Lida going to gymnasia where the uncles paid for it. She studied, what they hell she going to come here? She was read up you understand?

H: Mmhm.

J: So she come to see me, I say why don’t you go to America they want you to come? She says don’t tell me what to do. And she [*garbled foolish?*] I’ll never talk to you again, who are you to tell me what to do? She was really, going to school. The uncles adopted her like a, you underst—she wouldn’t go.

H: Is that Aunt Ann?

J: No, no, my older sister. So finally she wouldn’t go and she stays on. Now what comes along? Hitler comes along. They fight the, in them years, and Hitler takes over our town Vaverka, like [*garbled*] a small place, but she lived in the city, and she had a sweetheart. So, there was a name, you should know him, Trotsky.

H: Mmhm.

J: Trotsky was a Jew. When Hitler came they start running. So where’d he run? He run with a, with Trotsky, he’s a Jew. So he landed in [*garbled Krakow??*], I was never there, I was born in a village like [*garbled Homestead?*] Get to [Krakow??], and uh Trotsky says here there is no money. To get your education, everything for nothing, food and medication, there’s no money in existence. What do you want to do? My daughter s—my sister says well I want to be a dentist. Good, [*garbled* Now sweethearts?] he said, to him, you can get married, but you have to go in the service, you understand? So he married my sister. And this is bolshevism, see? And uh, he knocked her up and he enlisted in the service. He enlisted he had to go.

H: So this is the Russian Revolution?

J: Yeah. So, my sister wouldn’t take a comment, Trotsky was the boss. So finally she wants to be a dentist. Him, the army, but he, now when they give you a leave of absence, go and see your wife, so he chases her around, you understand? He gets a week off, and lays somebody else. And my sister found it out. So then toward the last few days he comes to see my sister, she says, I had a baby. And you get time off. And you didn’t have time to come here? I was busy. She knew he was chasing. I don’t want no part of you. Get outta here. I’ll be without she said. Trotsky went, and they, no money, she wanted to be a dentist. They give you everything free. She gave birth to the kid, and the kid, grew up, and she got married. What do you want to be? A doctor. You understand? Good. In the meantime, Trotsky was chased outta there, wh—what happened, he went to Mexico. They kidnapped him there or killed him whatever. There was no more Trotsky, Stalin took over, see. But to make the story short, my sister was a dentist, her daughter was a doctor, the son is law’s an engineer, and they. . . punished Jews, but they didn’t touch them. Anybody was young, and did work, and you didn’t talk, you kept your mouth shut you understand?

H: Mmhm.

J: They didn’t bother you. So my uh. . .I wouldn’t go to see her because she didn’t want [*garbled*] sometimes I’ll check and this, and my sister here wouldn’t go. But I had my nieces. [*garbled*] They all went to Radcliffe, the best colleges. And they said we’ll go and look up your sister. They went there, and they look her up. So when they looked her up and they come there, five o’clock in the morning. Beautiful, the sunshine is shining, there’s water, and she sees my sister, and she says, where’s your husband? Don’t talk he’s an engineer, he said something they were going to send him away to Siberia, but being as an engineer and he’s young, they gave him a break, you can’t talk and you can’t ask, you understand? So they’re there. So finally, my sister lived, from her daughter I’d say a little, fifty miles away, and she’d go and see her. So finally she said well, she’s for the government, everything is free, wonderful, and she goes and sees her daughter and she says, I’ll tell her what I think, I’m going to move to yous, so I don’t have to travel see? [*garbled*] says alright. She moves closer to her, my sister, and this sister of mine in Boston, she was a terrific woman see, her husband died, he was a dentist, and he left a little insurance, and my sister, this [Lizzy?] was so goddamn good, she couldn’t make a living as a butchers wife, she kept room and board, you understand? And she raised three kids. So the boys were no good. But her daughter was very good. So, she found a fellow and she got married, listen to this, she got married, and they live in eh, past Albany see, he works for the IBM, now listen to this, he doesn’t work for the IBM, he’s so goddamn brainy, and he travels, he sells ideas to the IBM what to do. You understand?

H: Mmhm.

J: And he’s wonderful. And my sister passed away, so this sister here, was up to see her. . .

H: Which sister was this?

J: Anna the one that’s here. She has no husband now, she gotta—

H: How did she get over here then?

J: Who?

H: Aunt Anne?

J: Get away with what?

H: Get over here to the United States? Why did she come over here?

J: She could come legitimate, she was, she wasn’t a boy I told you.

H: I know but I mean why, why did she come? Did she just want to come?

J: Yeah the—in Europe was nothing, it was lousy. So she came here and my sister raised a girl see, and this girl married a fella that lived next to the street to her, he’s a genius, he sells the brain to the IBM, and she married that fella. So this fella, lived on the same street with my sister. So this sister Anna of mine, see, this kid to her is like her own child, my sister Anna was [*garbled*] you understand? They come from Boston. They live in Albany or [*garbled Wassaic?*] I don’t know where. They come and pick my sister Anna up. And they take her for the Jewish holidays. They drive her and they give her a good time and they take her back. They watch her like its their child. So my sister Anna to them, like it’s her daughter you understand? Now Passover, she’s, they come and take her over, she’s alone, she should be with them and they [*audio cuts out*] she’s an old lady she lost her husband. I says Anna you’re all by yourself, get away from Boston, come here. I can’t and I can’t. Why? The weather is too hot here. I say whaddaya mean hot there’s air condition. I wouldn’t like it here. She doesn’t want to move here on account of them see. You understand?

H: On account of who?

J: [*glass knocks table frustratedly*] The kid that married that IBM! It’s her like a child you understand? They come to Passover they take her there, and they, they watch her see?

H: And where, who wanted her, who wanted her to move?

J: She says she has nobody, I says what the hell you staying move to Florida. Too hot. So anyways, so she sends gifts to them, you understand? Now, my sister in Europe, she sends gifts. She’s a [*garbled*] woman this Anna my sister, she used to send [*garbled*] gifts. You’re not allowed to but she’d send ‘em, she’d send ‘em clothes. So my sister moved there, near her daughter, and she went into the house, and she was hot, she slipped down, and she broke her spine over there and she passed away. She died. Now her daughter, never spoke Jewish you understand? And she doesn’t know what to do. And all of a sudden she gets a hundred dollar check from my sister. So she went somewhere’s, and looked up people that speak English, and she says look, write up a letter for me to this and this address. And thank Anna for the hundred dollars, we don’t need it, we can’t accept the money, and that’s the final, you understand she doesn’t speak Jewish, and uh, so this is her story. So now comes along my brother [*garbled Harry?*] [Hi!! Third person enters room]

 I say what do you mean [beer?] I don’t have a license? He says come over and see me. So I drive down to 5th Street. Where the drug business and [*garbled*] is there, you mean you don’t have any money? Yeah I got about fifteen dollars. He says take me in the car and let’s go. Take me to the beach, so he gets me to the beach on 7th and Washington Avenue. I never heard of Mercantile Bank or this, [*garbled*] takes me in, he says, here’s five hundred dollars. Go open an account, call it whatever you want, and when you get finished, step into the office, there’s the president. So I go, what the hell am I going to do, haha, so I put in five hundred and fifty dollars, because the money is given to him, not me, and I opened up I says call it Joe’s Bar, you understand? And uh, I get in the man says you Mr. Perlman? Yes. You have an account here? I says yes, I just opened. He buzzes, he says, put in five hundred more on Joe’s bar he just opened an account, they’re given it to [Meyer?] (maybe Meyer Lansky?) you understand? So I went for the license, nextdoor was a bookmaker, I never knew of those things, and eh, the boats are coming in, [*garbled*] says where you going to get a beer? I says I don’t know, so he send me in a case of beer, fifty bottles. Ha, I used to drink beer in Europe, I never saw that long of a bottle see? So I call him back and I say Mr. [Rosin? Roswell?] what is this? He says, I sent you a case of [Hathaway beer? Hotaway? Halfaway?] What’s Hathaway? Built in Havana or wherever. He says, you’re not going to make money all of the time, it's a new thing, he’s says the bootlegger, put out a bar and take a chance and get a buck and half a bottle, make it up while you can. So I don’t have the guts so I take the case of beer and I keep it inside. Comes in a man to me and he says, eh, Joe, give me two more bottles what you gave me last, last week. What’s that? Scotch. I says mister what are you talking about? I nev—Don’t tell me I bought it from you last week. Well they guy outside Joe, he was bootlegging liquor you understand? I gave it to him last week, I says you are making a mistake, huh. So I stand outside and I see a guy walking along. I says come here, you Joe? He says yes. Do you sell liquor? He says sure the state is going to go wet, I bootleg liquor. Says everybody ask me for two bottles, he says don’t chase the customers away. Take and sell liquor, the state is going to go wet. In the meantime until we get licenses, whatever I make I’ll give you fifty percent profit.You see I got breaks. So finally the state goes wet, and Meyer gave me, me, he gave it to [Rosenstein?], he gave me five thousand dollars, and then he set me plenty of liquor of all brands but its straight, a man came in he said, give me two canadian club, I didn’t know what I was giving, [*garbled*] I was selling. But then people saw, they came in, they give me a lot of business, and I says to mother, you do nothing, just sit in the front, watch the bar, and take the cash, because my buyer [*garbled*] combination. And comes in a man he says, can I get a job? Can you get a job, mother says talk to Mr. Perlman. Can I get a job with you? I says I don’t know, I got the license ready, he says, what are you going to make, you can’t make a living out of this, I’ll show you what, I’ll make you a [pussacatay???]. Who ever heard of [pussacatay?], you ever hear of it? I never heard of it. So he get’s behind the bar, and the guy stands there, and he mixes, I never saw that in my life. Ten, twelve drops [*garbled*] on the top, he says take a, take a sip. I don’t know what I’m sipping, so I says I don’t want it. Mother says don’t give it to me. So I sent it back to the bar, the bar, a guy stands on the bar and he says, let me try it. He sips it down he says to the bartender, mix me one more. The bartender says it’s three fifty a piece, he says did I ask you for the price? You understand? Three fifty a piece. And what happens to the bartender? He steals, he’d steal a little, mother was sitting and watching. So he doesn’t read. Leave a little. So he goes to work, whatever he takes in, he doesn’t read he loses his [*garbled*]. Mother watches. When we check out there’s no money see he steals it all, you understand? So and, I had an [*garbled axe him? accident?*] she got pregnant with David. [*garbled*] When I come back she says, how do you like the liquor business? I love it. How do you like David and I? I’m crazy about you. You’re going to make up your mind, either the liquor or David and I. I made a lot of money. But I could have made more see, I could have sold the liquor store, one store was a [*garbled flop?*] . And ever since, mother’s disliked liquor. I am now a [*garbled driver?*]. Now get this straight. David gives me the [*garbled*] he’s a [*garbled sick? straight?*] man. And uh, David gives [*garbled*]. And he comes along. I don’t drink no more liquor you understand? I do drink, can of beer, but I discovered I don’t want no beer, I really—not that I don’t want—on the TV you get [*garbled*] so I bought now little cans of budweiser. So I see mother drinks one and I don’t drink one. She takes a sip of one, good luck to her, so then I says skip the wine, I got little cans of beer. Eight ounce cans, Budweiser, and I take a sip of beer, say I’ll be good, be good. But mother is appalled see, the fault is, she used to write/ride when he was taking lessons, you too, he doesn’t know, he knows, you give’em a break. He doesn’t know how to drive. I grow up with him and he drives better than you. He’s eh, what the name, [*garbled*] daughter drives better than [*garbled*] you hit the curb and the, but, fahgetabowdit. So now, [noise] this man comes now you understand. . .[*garbled*] there’s things to discuss now, I’ll sit down with you, this, this is between you and I and mother.

first draft transcribed by Daniel Antoszyk (son of Wendy Perlman) in 2023