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THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS
DAVID ZELINKA

Dates of Interviews
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Interviewed by
Mildred Finger
DAVID ZELINKA was one of the great entrepreneurs of the coat and suit industry. Born into a family of retail custommakers, he was raised to know every facet of the business.

In 1941, he became a coat and suit manufacturer. In partnership with Max Matlick, he remained an active participant in the industry until 1975. Unwilling to diversify or take other steps to modernize the business, the partners preferred to disband.

The Oral History of David Zelinka provides insights into relationships with the industry, retail stores, the union, designers. His experience in licensing of firms in other countries for the replication of his firm's collections makes interesting reading. His travels to Europe and the Orient convey a very special point of view.

While in retirement from his business, he has remained active in industry affairs to the extent that his health permits.
Growing up in New York and learning parent's business

David Zelinka starts own business as manufacturer. Description of financing, sales

Zelinka-Matlick, Inc. in 1941 moves to 512 Seventh Avenue; David Zelinka attends couture showings starting 1948

Working with designers

Licensing with foreign manufacturers from 1951 on

Paul Honig and fabric buying in Europe

Buying in Europe and Hong Kong

More about licensing foreign firms

How the business operated in sales, production from 1950's until closing in 1975

David Zelinka describes helping merchants get jobs in stores and helping stores find executives

Relationship with F.I.T.

Relationship with ILGWU from 1941 on

Off Shore production and importation

Opinion re: future of New York as manufacturing center

Philanthropy
Q: Dave, I know you were literally born into the industry so will you tell us the story about that, where it happened, when it happened, and then we'll go on from there.

A: My mother and father came from Europe and were settled on the East side of New York. I was born in the back of their dress shop....

Q: ....Which was on Clinton Street.

A: ...On Clinton Street. And I grew up there....

Q: Excuse me, the year was...

A: ...1905. I grew up there; all the trials and tribulations we had, I lived through in that section of New York City. They were the first ones to be organized by the ILGWU.

Q: In what year was that?

A: 1909 or 1910.

Q: Um.

A: As a matter of fact, they arrested me for hitting a picket. Anyway, the fellow that walks up and down....

Q: With the sign from the Union. Yeah.

A: Because I....

Q: You were a small child though.

A: What?

Q: You were a small child.

A: I know but they were harassing my parents and I used a skate to hit 'em, in order not to bother my mother or father and they came and took me away to Clinton Street Police Station even though I didn't know what
my crime was. I only knew this was my mother and father.

Q: Tell me, tell us about the shop. How many machines did they have and....

A: They had twelve....

Q: ...What did they do?

A: They had twelve machines on the floor. Two sections of six each. My mother made dresses for the elite, so called elite on the East side. She made Sally Milgrim's wedding dress.

Q: So that she was working in a sense as a contractor?

A: Well, no. A contractor works for somebody else. She worked for herself.

Q: Oh, you mean, she didn't sell it to Sally Milgrim to resell?

A: No. The people brought in their own fabrics and trimmings and she cut it or my father cut it and put it together and gave it fittings. We lived in the back of our store. Then we were rich and we moved to the first floor. And we had the first automobile, the first piano player, the first bathtub. All the firsts were for Madam Zelinka because my mother was known all over as the dressmaker, and that's the environment I was brought up in. That was my whole life until we moved uptown to open a fine dress shop on Broadway.

Q: Tell me about your schooling. You went to school on the lower East side too.

A: I went to P.S. 60, and from there I went to New York University but never finished. I loved to do things that other kids didn't do, with the
result that I found myself out of school more than I was in school. But, it made me part of the East side, part of that growing up section that I was able to mix with all the people and get to know what makes these immigrants successful. What kind of a flame did they have that they were able to do things that other people never were able to match? And it was mainly stamina, guts; they fought for every single dollar they ever had. But, it brought success and with it, their children grew up and were able to go to college, to go to camp, to go to private school—they did everything that they should do for their children. This was a motivation that pushed them on. Today, you've got a different element. Today you want big names, big logos, designer names; they didn't have anything like that then.

Q: Did you learn the business through your parents' shop?
A: Exactly, everything I learned, I learned in their shop.

Q: Did you work there after school?
A: Yes. I worked after school, I used to make deliveries, pick up packages, study for my school and all in all I used to see everything that went on in the shop. Literally, they had a shop; it was not a shop as we know it today. It was a shop of a personal nature. And because they both were on the floor giving out the work, taking away the work, our father pressing the garments to see how they press, our mother sewing so they, they would hang properly, uh, every magazine that had, they had, Vogue and uh, whatever they had....

Q: Vanity Fair?
A: What?
Q: Vanity Fair.

A: All those were in the store for the customer to read. To say well she wants this on this page, the collar from this page, the skirt from this page, she usually picked four pages of what she wanted in one garment.

Q: That's fascinating. That was, that's something I have not heard about. Now, what happened when the union started to try to organize? Were they successful?

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Uh, huh.

A: We fought them for almost a year but it was becoming difficult because the people were frightened that the union people were all gangsters. That wasn't true.

Q: And that was as early as 1909?

A: Yes.

Q: That was before the Triangle shirt....

A: Yes.

Q: ...Fire?

A: The Triangle Shirt pushed the whole thing forward ten years. Finally, my father was the first one to sign up--give the people a day off, give them all the holidays and other things that he could give in those days. Didn't hurt him, didn't help him.

Q: So that was at the union contract?

A: Yes. And um, but they left us alone because we had no busi-
ness that we could get into trouble with. We didn't have that many work-
ers. I was born in that store. My bris, which is the circumcision party, was held in the store....

Q: And you were one of how many children?
A: Four.
Q: Four. I know that Adolph was your brother and he died very recently....
A: Two weeks ago.
Q: ...and the other two were....
A: ...my sister, who's alive and my youngest brother who used to be with her--he died also.
Q: Yeah, right.
A: All the way through. Uh, but as I grew up I went to college just the same. I, I, travelled with all the East side fellows even though, they had bad reputations but that's a mix I had in my lifetime to give me something so I could go ahead and run a business because today, the father hands the son the business.....
Q: Right.
A: ...that, you couldn't do that then.
Q: Tell us about when you moved up to Broadway. You, you said you were on Clinton Street, for the first, your mother's shop....
A: Right.
Q: Was on Clinton Street. And then you moved up to Broadway.
A: Um, we moved off to where the Polydoor used to be situated.
We had a dress shop. That's the first time....

Q: About what street was that. Do you remember?
A: Forty Seventh and Forty Eigth. The first time....
Q: And Broadway?
A: Broadway. And we went into ready-to-wear.
Q: Okay. Because before that you had been a custom...I mean....
A: Only a custom tailor....
Q: ...Right.
A: ...Never carried ready-to-wear.
Q: Um, hm.
A: Then as a salesman, we began to....
Q: Excuse me, what year was it that you moved up, approximately?
A: Oh, 19, 19, I think 1916.
Q: Be..., Before the, or during the First World War?
A: Oh yes....
Q: About the First World War.
A: ...Because I do remember the First World War.
Q: And you were uptown already.
A: No, I was downtown...
Q: You were downtown.
A: I was there when, they, they yelled "armistice" and I was riding a truck with a flag: "the war is over, the war is over...."
Q: So it was after the war that you moved uptown?
A: Finally, yes.
Q: Okay.
A: The, and then, then my brother and I both helped my parents in the business. I worked for a firm as a salesman and he worked for somebody for a time, but at night we used to come at five o'clock, we left our jobs and went to sell dresses on the floor.
Q: They were still retailers?
A: Always....
Q: Always retailers?
A: Always.
Q: ...and they carried, and they carried ready-to-wear.
A: Ready-to-wear.
Q: Right.
A: They gave up the dressmaking. It was impossible to satisfy the customers with so many ideas.
Q: So they went into ready-to-wear and you were working for a firm in the ready-to-wear market as a salesman?
A: Yes.
Q: And your brother was working for a different firm.
A: Right.
Q: But then after work, after you were through you would go to the shop and help?
A: Yes.
Q: Okay. How big did those businesses get? Those stores?
A: Very small. They never got big because we thought small, we lived small and everything we did was small. My father lost money in the break in 1929, so every dollar was important to him. So that when I decided I wanted to go into business, he said to me, he had, I think, twenty thousand dollars in the bank, he'd give me all his money, because the only hope I could ever have was to go into business. He says, "if you work for somebody else, you will never be successful. You'll live like mother and father; like we do, you... When you go into business, you're the boss and if you have the brains and ability to carry on, then you can do things and work a business up, and be an independent operator all the way through". And....

Q: So you went into business?
A: Then I went into business.

Q: At about what year was that? 1930, or 31, or something like....

A: ...Uh, somewheres around there.

Q: At, the Depression had started in '29?
A: Yeah.

Q: The crash came in 29?
A: No, during the Depression I was working for somebody because I needed the money my father had in the bank....

Q: Yeah.

A: We went to three different banks and stood in line to get our money out. Uh, and we didn't get anything at banks. But, fortunately, we had a good business, good customers. We had all theatrical customers.
Q: Yeah, in that area, theatrical customers....
A: That's all we had. They, all they knew was how to take money from the johns.
Q: Right. And then return the clothes.
A: All the time....
Q: And get some of the money back. (laughter)
A: Absolutely.
Q: Yes, (laughter) Right.
A: We had to be part of this otherwise....
Q: Sure, sure.
A: ...we couldn't be in business with them. So that, if a man bought, three garments for a girl, the next day she came back with two.
Q: Right, right. I've heard that story another time.
A: Well it happened to me.
Q: Sure, sure.
A: And I know about it. But, um....
Q: Now when, so when you went into business it must have been somewhere in the mid-thirties? After....
A: Yes, because in thirty four....
Q: I think it was thirty six.
A: What?
Q: I think it was in 1936.
A: No, in thirty five.
Q: Thirty five, okay.
A: I went in with Matlick.

Q: Weren't you alone first?

A: Yes. I was in the business, well, I, I would say alone because I had a partner whose object was to play pinochle on Friday, on pay-day. He'd take the money back again that he paid out for work to the people; and that's why I couldn't stay with him.

Q: What building had you opened up in?
A: 265 West 37th Street.

Q: Uh, huh.

A: And uh, then I went in business for myself. And I hired a fellow by the name of Freddy Kalman. He had worked for S. Goldberg.

Q: Um, hm. Okay.

A: And uh, when I went on the road for my first trip, he took some money out and bought insurance, and then killed himself.

Q: Oh gracious.

A: So that's a nice experience, Uh.....

Q: Well, now, then, the next thing you did was to go into business with Max Matlick?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. now then I'd like to talk, to hear from you a lot about the way you went into business. How much money did it take in those days, to, to....

A: Twenty thousand dollars.

Q: Twenty thousand dollars was your total investment.
A: Yeah.
Q: And was that where you were at 265 West 37th or had you, did you....
A: No, now we opened up at 246 West 38th Street....
Q: Ah, okay.
A: And uh, but there we manufactured our clothes. We had a factory.
Q: Um, hm. On the premises?
A: On the premises and contractors and we did all the things we thought we should do in order to be successful. Our business worked great from the minute we started.
Q: Uh, approximately how much business would you count on doing, per year in the first five years?
A: The first five years, I think we did about uh, maybe seven, eight hundred thousand dollars and then we jumped quickly, two million, three million....
Q: Right, yeah.
A: ....it, it moved very quickly once the buyers knew we had what they wanted and.....
Q: Okay, how did you, how did you, ah, get them to be aware of you? What did you do in those days to make buyers and store people generally know who you were?
A: Well, we hired a designer, Max Matlick was one of the best price goods man in the business. We were backed by Juilliard.
Q: Oh, in the business?
A: ...in the business.
Q: Do you mean that they put up the twenty thousand for you...
A: No, but they loaned us a good....
Q: They gave you a good line of credit.
A: ...good line. I borrowed money from Al Neiman, who was a friend of mine, because the twenty thousand wasn't enough to operate. And, uh, we made a good product from the day we started. And my first customer was Joe Greenman, who just died. His son is married to my daughter. Peculiarly, as it happens, he and my brother died three days apart. So I had a nice session.
Q: What organization was he with? Because, I'm sorry....
A: Martin's in Brooklyn.
Q: Oh, right, okay.
A: The best coat house in the business in those days.
Q: Um, hm.
A: They were a specialty store and they carried only better goods. And we made only better goods.
Q: What was your price range then?
A: Our price range then was from 13.75 to 39.75.
Q: And that was for suits?
A: Suits or coats.
Q: Or coats. In other words, you did both.
A: We did, any..., whatever they wanted. But we quickly trav-
elled to 19.75, 26.75, 29....there was no holding back because the people wanted good class merchandise, and we had it at a price because, while we weren't discounters, we sold cheaper than our competitors.

Q: Um, hm.

A: And, uh, within two or three years, Johnny Frumkes was a competitor, Joe Kraeler was a competitor....

Q: I'm sorry, who was it, what was that name, Joe what?

A: Kraeler.

Q: Do you know how to spell it? I don't know, I can't....

A: K-r-a-e-l-e-r.

Q: Kraeler, Joe Kraeler. Okay.

A: Then it became Kraeler, Fraiska--the name. But he was very big, very big. And uh, then everybody became our competitor, because we were going ahead and they were not. And they wanted to know what we were doing that helped us gain their customers.

Q: Did you in those days have a travelling sales force? Or did everybody come into the showroom?

A: No. We had a third partner when we started. A fellow by the name of Donovan.

Q: Donovan.

A: You must have known him. There were three Donovan brothers. And this Donovan. Donald Donovan....

Q: Donald Donovan.

A: ...became our third partner. In one year he was doing so
well, he wanted to be on commission. So, ....

Q: He was the sales manager or was he the only salesman?
A: He's the only salesman.

Q: He was the only salesman.
A: But he would, then he wanted to be in, business for himself by being on commission because he was backed by a few good customers, and he thought he'd make a better living on commission than he could the regular way. The result was that we gave him that contract, and that year was one of our biggest years. We must have made about three hundred thousand dollars net profit.

Q: My goodness.
A: So, he was on commission. So his commission amounted to thirty thousand dollars; that's all he got. And he very angry and he walked out. Because we wouldn't give him back his third after that.

Q: Um, hm.
A: And uh, all his customers came to see me. "Take him back, I'll give him more business". I said no, I can't. The man, the man has given me too much trouble to be our partner. We wanted to give him a partnership--no investment. We had had so little money, and as a matter of fact we had so little money that George Parkas (founder of Alexander's).

Q: Um, hm.
A: ...came to us for money. I think we had accumulated fifty thousand dollars. He says, "you don't loan me, I can't do business with you."
So we showed him that we had a net worth of fifty thousand, so he took home twenty five thousand. He paid it back in one year.

Q: All right, I'm not sure I understand. George Parkas borrowed from you?
A: Yes, sure.
Q: Oh, I thought you meant he lent you money.
A: No, no....
Q: George Parkas borrowed from you?
A: He had no money.
Q: ...For Alexanders?
A: Yeah, he had no money. He had to borrow everything that he needed to open Alexanders.
Q: My gracious.
A: Oh, as a matter of fact, our twenty five thousand dollars would have been worth two and a half million dollars if he never took the money out. He told us that. We, he, he insisted on, we had to take it back and we were glad to get it back because we had no capital to talk about....
Q: Sure, yeah right.
A: ...to operate with.
Q: In those days you didn't work with factors. Did you work with the bank?
A: No, no factors. Yes, with the bank. And I was very fortunate I had a good reputation that the bank gave me as much money as I had. I had fifty thousand, they'll loan me up to fifty thousand. And uh,...
Q: Was that Sterling?
A: No.
Q: No.
A: Banker's Trust.
Q: Um hm.
A: At that time it was known as the Public National Bank.
Q: Uh, huh. Right.
A: But the, I'm fifty two years in the Banker's Trust on Thirty Ninth Street. They're going to give me a party.
Q: Dave, when did you move to 500?
A: Uh, no 512.
Q: 512, excuse me, 512 Seventh Avenue.
A: In 1941.
Q: Incidentally, when you mention 1941, had you gone to Europe before 1941?
A: No.
Q: It was only after the war that you began to go?
A: Absolutely.
Q: All right. So, I'm sorry, I seem to have interrupted you, you said in 1941....
A: No, you must interrupted me. I can't remember everything.
Q: Okay. In 1941, you moved to 512 Seventh Avenue.
A: Right. And we went in there, fixed up a beautiful loft got a good lease and in 19..., we couldn't go to Europe then, but in 1948 I went to see Christian Dior.
Q: The new look was '47, you didn't see the....
A: No.
Q: You went in '48?
A: I didn't know, know anything. I had hired Jeanne Legon. She worked for Milstein one time.
Q: Dan Milstein?
A: Yes.
Q: Jeanne Legon. How do you spell Legon. Do you remember?
A: L-e-g-o-n.
Q: A French name.
A: Um hm. And she was a blonde. And uh, she used to work for Louie Segal. And she had made a trip one year before....
Q: Um, hm.
A: ...for, uh....
Q: For Lou Segal? Was she working for him then?
A: Yes. But she worked for Dan Milstein for one year. And we were told by a store on Fifth Avenue, "she's the best, you want to try it", so we hired her. Because that moved us right to the fashion business entirely. Changed everything.
Q: Up until then you had been what? Very classic?
A: Very classic.
Q: Yeah, um, hm.
A: We were afraid.
Q: Well, did you have, but you had a designer before her?
A: We always had a designer.

Q: But a very conservative one.

A: Always, I mean she used to battle with him tooth and nail to do what she wanted to do and this fellow used to say, "it can't work, we can't this, we can't that" until we hired Rexy Abeles.

Q: Oh yes, I remember her very well. Sure.

A: Rexy Abeles. She was with us fourteen years.

Q: Yeah, I remember her very well.

A: That changed everything because she knew how to make a sleeve, a cuff, how to make a shoulder.

Q: Yeah. Dave, I'm sorry, clarify it for me. When you said that Jeanne Legon was your designer you said that the other person would not, ah, always had a reason why something could not be....

A: A member of the Designers Guild used to work for us.....

Q: Uh, huh.

A: ...a pattern man.

Q: Ah, I see, he was a patternmaker and he would not do original designs?

A: No, no. He wanted to but she always stopped him. So, uh, he used to come to us and tell us, "don't do this, don't do that," you know, "you can't work this shoulder like this". He tipped us off to everything technically wrong that these designers used to want to do.

Q: Um, hm. Um. hm.

A: So, we were much smarter than we would be if we didn't have them.
But we always had a member of a fashion guild.

Q: Um, hm. Um, hm.
A: They were all men. They were patternmen. That's what they really were.

Q: Not creative designers?
A: No.

Q: Did you, incidentally, ever buy sketches? I've been hearing from some people....
A: Yes.

Q: ...about sketches that they bought.
A: I, my whole life, I bought sketches.

Q: Through a service here like Cardinal or....
A: I bought here what I bought from Valentino at two dollars a sketch.

Q: From Valentino?
A: Yeah.

Q: Which Valentino?
A: The famous one.

Q: But, he's too young to have been working in those days.
A: No, he wasn't. I bought in Europe from him.

Q: Oh, that was later. I'm talking about, well somebody like Shannon Rogers who used to sell sketches.
A: No. I uh....

Q: But he was not, uh, he didn't sell to you.
A: No. But we had....
Q: There were other people who....
A: ....fifty people here selling....

Q: Right. And that was, so that your patternmaker would execute those sketches. That....
A: With the proviso of this designer that we had working. She would get them first and check the sketches. And then she'd take the sketches and change them all around the way she liked them and then she'd go in and, "Max, make a crinoline for this"....

Q: Um, hm. Make a crinoline for it?
A: Yeah.

Q: But to, yeah. And, but this was....
A: My voice isn't so good to....

Q: That's okay, that's all right. Dave, don't worry about it.

This is, your talking about Jeanne Legon.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And then when Rexy came to you....
A: She did the same things.

Q: But, uh, Jeanne Legon was no longer there.
A: No, no.

Q: This was her replacement?
A: Jeanne Legon, I caught her selling my styles. Dorothy Shaver (of Lord & Taylor) had the coat buyer, Miss Pierce tip us off.

Q: Uh, huh. Right. Okay.
A: And, we gave her five hundred dollars and fired her in the middle of a contract. And then she worked for Nardis of Dallas.
Q: Um, hm.
A: See, nobody hired her here, nobody. Word got around.
Q: So you hired Rexy Abeles.
A: That's when we hired Rexy and she worked for us for fourteen years after that. Same thing, but now we began spreading ourselves. I had fourteen licensees long before Calvin Klein or any of them were in the business. We had....
Q: In other countries?
A: Yeah. Only other countries--Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, even in Paris.
Q: How did you get started with licensees?
A: Well, I got one for Canada. He recommended me to a fellow in Australia. A fellow in Australia told me about a fellow in New Zealand. New Zealand said, "you ought to go to see so and so, an Italian". The Italian fellow said, "so and so..." First thing you know, we made all our money on licensees not the regular customers.
Q: What, do you remember about what year this all happened?
A: Yes, uh, when I started about 1951.
Q: Um, hm. After you had begun to go to Europe.
A: Only after we were going to Europe.
Q: Yeah, right.
A: Because, Europe was the bait.
Q: Right.
A: But then, they never went.
Q: I see.
A: All these people used to look at us for guidance.
Q: Did you sell, did you send them samples? How did....
A: Yes.
Q: ...work your licensing?
A: We used to charge them a flat fee at that time. Uh, ten thousand, five thousand, twenty five hundred, depending on what the size of the firm was....
Q: Um, hm.
A: And, uh,....
Q: And in return for that money, you, sent them samples?
A: Samples of belts and crinolines and all the things they needed....
Q: Fabric swatches, all that kind of thing.
A: ...everything they needed long before the French people got in to this licensing act. Because the French people got in because they said, "who the hell needs Zelinka to sell London."
Q: Um, hm.
A: "Like Marks and Spencer or somebody when we live next door; we could sell them ourselves." And that's how it all happened. Because we had licensees when nobody had them.
Q: Well, that, it sounds as though you were very early. I didn't know you had licensees.
A: We were very early and we accumulated a lot of money. Left all the money in Switzerland. And finally, we settled with the government. We told
the government that we were advisors and they said, "well, let's call it capital gains....

Q: It's okay.
A: ...well, how much do you want?" We told him how much was in the account. The accountants told him; gave us an amount and we paid the government, we took the rest and we went to New York....

Q: And how many years did you do this licensing?
A: Until the day we closed.

Q: Really, um, hm. All right, so now let's go back. 1948 you started to go to the couture. Is this when you began to have your....
A: No.
Q: ...friendship.
A: The, uh, my first year we went really for all couture was '51.
Q: Oh, sorry.
A: We went in '48, to see Dior after he came out with the "new look."
Q: Right.
A: And Liebes on the coast....
Q: Liebes, H. Liebes....
A: ...he made us go, he says, "you go be the first one to go."

And I got there, I found Dan Milstein had already had been here. But, I have my own ideas so I went to Spain, to Portugal, to Italy. He didn't go; I went. And I picked up ten thousand, five thousand, three thousand and we had a fellow....

Q: Ten thousand, five thousand, three thousand? You mean....
A: Dollars, yeah.

Q: ...for licensing, arrangements, uh, huh.

A: We had a fellow in South America who came with twenty five thousand dollars. He didn't know how to go to....

Q: Explain to me though, the twenty five thousand dollars that the South American gave you was in exchange for your providing him with the sketches, or the prototypes....

A: Absolutely, yeah.

Q: ...And did you, I know you travelled in those years a lot with Paul Honig.

A: Tremendous with him.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: Four times a year.

Q: And did you, did you buy piece goods over there?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes you did.

A: He was my piece goods buyer.

Q: Um, hm. Um, hm.

A: We used to introduce him as a piece goods buyer and everywhere we went, the government used to roll out the carpets to the greatest piece goods man they ever saw. They all tried to take him away. Wanted to give him twice as much money in Belgium, there was a Belgian who used to pay me eighteen thousand dollars a year, so he says, "I'll give this fellow twenty thousand dollars....I said, "we pay him fifteen, "I'll give him twenty."
Q: But let me make sure I understand. You were using Paul as a piece goods buyer for you.

A: Yes.

Q: And they did not know he was a, a,...

A: No, not in the beginning.

Q: They didn't know he was Anglo.

A: The first three years they did not know he was Anglo.

Q: Um, hm.

A: After that, once they knew he was Anglo, they used to fall all over him for ideas. And uh, many of the fabrics that we made a fortune on, he designed. Because he used to sketch out what he wanted and I said, "all right, I'll buy twelve pieces of goods to start with. If I like it, I'll give you an order for a hundred. So, sure enough, uh, it worked, that's the way it worked out.

Q: That you bought all these piece goods in Europe so that you really had a pretty big business going....

A: These were all originals. Then, Monarch later came in, and tried to follow me wherever....

Q: Who was that?

A: Monarch. Frumkes.

Q: Oh, Joey Frumkes of Monarch.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes, right, um hm.

A: He found out what I was doing....
Q: Right.
A: And he went to Paul; and Dan Milstein went to Paul, they said "if you're going to give ideas to Zelinka for Europe, you don't give us, to us, we won't buy from you". So he told him, "go fly a kite". He didn't give any ideas....his ideas....
Q: Um, hm.
A: And he gave the ideas to me, and it worked out beautiful.
Q: Um, so it worked out beautifully and how many trips did you make to Europe for the couture?
A: Fifty five.
Q: Fifty five. (laughter)
A: Yeah.
Q: Did you find enough clothes there to buy that would be useful to you in your collection?
A: I always bought, I had to buy....
Q: Yeah.
A: ...Because of my licensees. I couldn't afford not to buy. And uh, I bought from everyone of them. There was not such a thing as me saying, I don't like that client. I won't buy for them. But, other...., always good or bad, or indifferent. I was down buying my two, three pieces. Went to Balenciaga....
Q: Yeah.
A: Bought two, three pieces. Simonetta, Fabiani, I used to buy a lot from them. As a matter of fact, I consummated a marriage of those two orginally. And, now, the Italian fashion was started by four of us. Russell Carpenter,
Q: Um, hm.
A: Hannah Troy,....
Q: Um, hm.
A: Dave Zelinka and a fellow by the name of Morgan in Cananda.
Q: Yes, right. Yeah. Uh, yeah. And also wasn't Dave Nemerov very much involved? Dave Nemerov of Russeks?
A: No.
Q: No.
A: Not in this. He was too busy with furs.
Q: I see.
A: Dave Nemerov never bothered with any of us. And we three, four started the Italian fashions. And uh, at the same time, we organized it, put it together. Course, Hannah Troy got the medal....
Q: Yes.
A: ...But that didn't bother me. But from it came four licensees.
Q: In Italy?
A: Sure.
Q: Why do you think that they were so interested in licensing the American product? Was it because you already had worked out all the bad features or the difficult features?
A: Great for them. They didn't have to fix a thing. They put the pattern on the table, it worked.
Q: Because you had already gotten all the problems solved.
A: Solved. Secondly, I needed buckles and belts and other things I went to Spain....
Q: Um, hm.
A: ...I bought them there. Uh, uh, I went to Hong Kong....I'm giving you one instance, remember "Love was a many splendored thing"?

Q: Um, hm.
A: Went to Hong Kong. I wanted to see where the movie was made. With luck, we see all kinds of silks hanging around. So we turned around. We go back to where the factory is. A washing machine, that was a factory. We asked the man can he make any designs for us, "sure, what'd ya like". "Well, I'll tell you what, I like this gold thing and the bottom of the lining for my coats--Zelinka Matlick in Chinese.

Q: Uh, huh.
A: So he said to me, "no trouble." When will it be ready? He says, "tomorrow morning". I came back the next morning; it was beautiful. But "Zelinka Matlick" he made so big. I said, "it's too big, the customers don't want to see my name so big, make it small." No trouble. He changed this and this. When will it be ready....

Q: ....Tom.... (laughter)
A: Tomorrow morning. The next day I came, exactly what I wanted. I bought thirty pieces of lining, half pieces....

Q: That's about thirty to forty yards....
A: Yeah.
Q: Per piece, per half piece.
A: And I shipped it in by plane so as not to waste any time. Matlick got it here; he loved it. He says, "buy three thousand yards". And he picks up
the phone and says, "you know, Dave, we can charge five dollars or more per coat with this lining. Nobody can copy them. Sure enough. We sold fifty thousand coats.

Q: My God.
A: Everybody was saying, where the hell did we get that lining? They loved them! The customers loved that lining. That's why my suits from twenty years and thirty years ago, have all these fancy silk linings in them because they came from there....

Q: And nobody could copy them.
A: No, finally they copied them but by this time I was through with it.

Q: Right, that's a, that's a lovely story, wonderful story....
A: Just, that's one of the. I can sit here all night and give you little stories; you'd be amazed. We stopped in Barcelona one day. I fell in love with these hats they had, the....

Q: Bullfighters, hats?
A: Yeah...little hats, but they had all the fringe....out of needle stuff. What'd they call,....

Q: ...Soutache braid?
A: Yea, the family, only it was made out of metal. It shone. The whole thing was small. So I said to Ruth....

Q: Ruth is your wife.
A: Yeah.

Q: You'd been married a long time by then.
A: Yeah. I said, "what the hell can we do to use hats like that. She says, make it in felt. So I ordered some. I sent them to New York, and Matlick says it's a good idea because he says, "I don't know what to put on the lapels of some suits that are too plain". Well, we took the measurements, ordered two at thirty five cent a piece. I can't begin to tell you how much money we made on that idea alone.

End of Tape 1, Side 1
Q: Dave, would you clarify a little bit, the story in, licensing of other countries' manufacturers. Where you sent them the clothes that were taken from the European models, what time elapsed between the time you saw the clothes in Europe and the time you sent them to the licensees everywhere?

A: I would say that for those licensees that were in my time zone, that is, North America, Canada, Mexico, it took about 60 days. We had licensees in South America, for instance, in Paraguay, Buenos Aires, and places like that that didn't need them as quickly as Northern ones did. So, we took the sketches, we didn't wait for the originals, we couldn't wait. So Rexy put the sketches together; and I went into the sample room with her and told the samplemaker what we wanted. And, so what he worked on was the swatches, the fabrics we were going to use. A piece of belt, (otherwise, I didn't buy a belt for every one of them, some of the belts sell for a hundred dollars a piece). But, I managed somehow or other to either get a piece of belt where I said to the fellow, "I'll tell you what to do, you give me about six inches of the belt, let me show it to my partner; if he likes it, I'll take a hundred dozen," something like that. So I carried that with me, home. From that I made other belts so that everybody received it about the same time. Now, I couldn't keep back, because once I cut, I cut twelve or eighteen, or fourteen of everything. So I didn't....

Q: So that each licensee would get one.

A: Whether he needed it or not. If he wasn't clear or didn't know what to do with it, he came to New York, or he called me on the phone or he sent me a long letter for an explanation. From the time I arrived home from Europe to the
time we shipped samples out, about sixty days.

Q: Okay. About two months....

A: Two months.

Q: ...all together. Right. Very good. Okay. How many years....

you started this in 1951....

A: Yeah.

Q: And you went on for doing that, for a number of years, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, so you want to tell us how many years, and what else you were doing.

A: Yes. Let me correct this. I went in 1950 because I made my first trip with Jeanne Legon. She knew Europe and I didn't. So, we went to Paris and she took me to all the houses that she knew: Jacques Fath, Givenchy, Balenciaga, all of them. Then she had a lot of little bunks that she didn't tell me about. She got the ideas and came back and said she found this and that: all part of the conspiracy of not working with your employer but doing things that are self aggrandizement for yourself. Until such time as I discovered her selling the things to other manufacturers, of course, that I fired her.

Q: Right. You mentioned that, you've discussed it.

A: I want to bring that back again. Uh, now, every designer that told her, followed the same procedure. So that we didn't try something different every time because we would flounder. It's different today, because today, Bill Blass makes chocolates. Now he don't make the chocolates, or the tires or anything else like that. We know most of these things they have nothing to do with
--it's names. Buyers are buying names all over the world. In my time, they had to buy either Zelinka-Matlick or the manufacturers, themselves, who made it in the European coutnties. So, eventually, I found my name Zelinka-Matlick; I was in Peru once and a woman's wearing a coat with a label--Zelinka-Matlick; I'm in Hong Kong, Zelinka-Matlick; I'm in Italy looking in the window, I said, "gee, that coat looks familiar. Madam, where did you get it" It's a foreign woman. "Oh," she said, "my importer imports them from Zelinka-Matlick". He didn't buy it from me, I never sold a garment to a single manufacturer, anywheres. So they began to look like we did it here in America. These were the trials and tribulations that these people had to work for. And this is the problems they had. But, I helped them as much as possible. If they would pay for my trip, Jeanne Rexy, and I would hop on a plane and be in London the next morning. We had three. Three all together: one made coats, one made suits and one made costumes. And we worked with them and we divided the cost of the trip among the three of them.

Q: Right.
A: And we told them what was wrong, what was right, do this do that and in three days we were out of there. Gone. But this was real licensing as I understood it in those days.

Q: Right.
A: Today, it's a different story entirely.

Q: Right.
A: You can make saddles, uh, you can make anything you want, just put your name on it.
Q: But what you were doing was really the same thing that they needed to do, the manufacturers to whom the licensing....
A: They, because they had to sell the merchandise....
Q: ...Right, right.
A: And most of them used the Zelinka-Matlick. In Australia, there is a big firm called Zelinka-Matlick.
Q: Right, right.
A: We have a big firm, Zelinka-Matlick. I didn't incorporate it. I didn't pay for it, they did.
Q: Right.
A: And they billed, they advertised for ten years; they advertised Zelinka-Matlick, America.
Q: Okay. Dave, how long did you keep on going to Europe. All the way through?
A: All the way through until I grew tired.
Q: And during the course of these years, were there any other events that you think were especially interesting to talk about?
A: If I don't answer you quickly, it's because I didn't know that's one of the questions.
Q: Okay.
A: You see.
Q: Dave, when did you decide to go out of business and why?
A: I found that I wasn't willing to change the type of garments or to do things differently than other people were doing. Sportswear was big.
I didn't want to make sportswear.

Q: About what year is this now?

A: Uh, seventy to seventy five. Sportswear was very big, I didn't want to make sportswear. I wanted to make what I thought I knew. I was very cautious because I didn't want to lose my money on something I didn't know anything about. Maybe I would have made ten times as much money. But, we had our children in the business but when they wanted to change it....

Q: Who were the children who were in the business?

A: Jerry Matlick, um, Stanley Matlick, and Robert Zelinka. Now, Robert left us to go in with Shearson Hayden, Stone.

Q: Oh, I see, in the investment market.

A: He loved investments. This day to day businesss, with "coca-camamie" customers bothered him. He made several trips for us on the road, with the road salesman. I had a group of road salesmen.

Q: Oh that was different from the beginning. In the beginning you only had the one man, Donovan. But you did have a road staff...

A: We added all the time. We added road salesmen. Wherever we found the territory live enough for us, we put a man on. With the result, one man was with us for almost thirty years. He was a Southern man.

Q: Um, hm.

A: He came with us right after we began. And he was with us until we closed.

Q: So you did have more than just the one salesman?

A: Oh, we had about as much as seven.
Q: All of them on the road....
A: Yeah. And in New York....
Q: Um, hm.
A: Most of them lived here.
Q: And they just travelled, at the um....
A: With every line. Maybe four lines a year. And we made duplicate lines....
Q: Duplicate lines that they took with them....
A: And they took the lines out and went out to sell lines at that time. We joined various markets long before people ever heard of Atlanta, Miami. In Los Angeles we had an office....
Q: Chicago?
A: In Chicago we had an office. It was cheap as hell. You know....
Q: Dave, tell us about what happened when you were not able to keep all your people usefully at work all the time?
A: Well, certain union people you were able to lay off and take back, but the ordinary people like designers, even sample makers and salesman you couldn't let go and then two months later get them back to work. That's not the way it worked. If you had a good salesman, and you let him go some other firm would pick him up. With the result that you had to keep your expenses as high as they were because you had nothing to lower, so the only thing we could lower was our old expenses, labor. You couldn't take it from the salesmen, you know. And we lowered our expenses to keep up with slow production. Then when we started in with the new production, we started in with the new production, we started to in-
vite everybody to come back again. We found out that this one is missing, and that one is missing. This type of tailor, we couldn't get him back. And, all in all, we lost between the Fall season and the Spring season, about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in non-useful merchandising where we had to prepare a new line and wind up the old one.

Q: But you did not want to go into other kinds of merchandise.

A: No. I didn't have the guts or the inclination, let's say, to jeopardize what I worked for all my life to try out a sportswear concern, a dress concern, skirts, anything big that they were making. Today, chinos, what are they....

Q: Bluejeans.

A: Bluejeans, bluejeans were nothing, ten years ago. It was an item. That was, that was the kind of item I'd have to go into. And uh, we figured out, we didn't want to spend the money. And the result was that other people with nothing to lose, opened up different concerns. Some were successful and some went broke in very short order. That's why today, you have the highest bankruptcy rate in the nation in the apparel business.

Q: Well now, then you began to think of going out of business in 1974.

A: Yes. And in '75, 1975 we went out.

Q: And, but you turned over the business, to the Matlick sons and to a third partner.

A: Yes, some young man who worked with them. There were three young men and we turned over everything we had here. Didn't charge them five cents for one thing, not the machine, and cutting machine, and bookkeeping mach-
ines, and IBM machines, and everything we had, maybe a hundred thousand dollars worth of odds and ends. We gave them the whole works and we left. They gave us office space, but in one year they dropped two hundred thousand dollars.

Q: That was in 1975? or?
A: No, that was 1977.
Q: Uh, huh. Right. So that you, yourselves, actually withdrew from the business in about '75 or '76?
A: Right. '75 I cut out. The end of '75 I cut out all expenses.
Q: Um, hm.
A: We sold our loft to somebody else in the building, bought the loft and took the boys with him. At the time he took an interest. Garay.
Q: Yes, Garay. G-a-r-a-y.
A: He bought it, and he didn't pay the rent. He came to me for a lot of rent. That's a long story.
Q: Okay. Dave going back a little bit, I'd love to hear, how you felt about your relationships with buyers, and stores in the early days. And then what happened later on.
A: Yes. Well when we went in business, I had a following of buyers....
Q: From the days when you were a salesman for somebody else?
A: Yes. My partner did that. But we were good for each other because he was a great production man. And we made a good product and a good price, and immediately it became very successful. Even though, as I told you before, at the start, we took a third partner because certain buyers forced us to take him.
In one year, he made a lot of money. He wanted to be paid cash. So we gave him commission. That year we made about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which is unheard of and he was so angry with us, he left the firm. Or, uh, but now, I went on the road and made acquaintances, friends....

Q: This is about 1937, thereabouts?
A: Exactly.
Q: Okay.
A: And as these friendships grew, many of these people were growing up into the business and needed better jobs. I thought to myself, gee, wouldn't it be great if I could find a place for myself where I could get them these jobs. But who did I know way up on top; I didn't know them, then. I had a few friends, but I was determined so I got acquainted with all the people from the presidents down. This took a long time but I made it my business to get close to them. Then an opportunity opened up--The Fashion Institute of Technology. In 1944, came into being. And I was president of my association and I was asked would I head the FIT organization. Not Shirley Goodman's job. She was executive secretary....

Q: Executive Vice Pres....
A: No.
Q: No. Oh.
A: These titles she's got now, she just got in the last three, four years. So she's getting everything we can give her. I said I'd try it, if it didn't work out, then I'll go back to my old job as president of the Association.

Q: This is all at the same time that you were in your own business?
A: yes. I was a businessman. Sure enough, I found that as the school was growing, I was growing into it with other people. I had to ask somebody about money, I'd call the president of Macy's, the president of Bloomingdale's, this one, that one, yeah, my name is David Zelinka, uh, you don't know me, I'm the President of the College, yeah, I gave myself all kinds of titles, anything to open the door. Well they said, "if you want to talk about that come on up here because I can't talk to you on the phone." One by one like wooden soldiers, I knocked them down until I had a coterie of the best people throughout of the stores. These people gave me lunches and dinners and they put me on TV, anything to help them....

Q: Help FIT or help Zelinka-Matlick?
A: No. No. Help the store....
Q: ...the store, okay.
A: But, they didn't know what they were doing was helping me as my business. And FIT came into the picture gradually. And then I got to know them over a period of years. I don't want to go through it because that's a long story by itself. But, I began to call the Presidents of every store in the United States by their first name. And, every graduate who wanted to work in some city in the United States, I got them the job. It was nothing for me to call the Maas Brothers in Florida and say, "hey George, we got the best girls for you. They only want to work for you." "Well, I don't know," "Give them a summer job, you don't have to keep them". "All right Dave." They lived down there, so they wanted to work down there. This started out with thirty students, forty students, sixty students, ninety students. I think when I told them "hey, lay off me," I had
about three hundred to four hundred students already placed all over the United States. Not only did I help these students who now are the presidents of stores, but I got to know the presidents of the stores, or the merchandise men, or heads of all the other stores who were in that business. So, one day I find that they started to call me. "Hey Dave, maybe you could help me out, your girls are terrific. I need two girls for this, two for that, four girls for here, maybe you got a young man who knows this or this. I said yes to everything. And of ninety percent we placed, I think about eighty worked out beautifully. And the others that gave them jobs, not just the jobs, they hired them for. And it was a relationship that I think that nobody (I don't care how big they are today) had, or will ever have with the heads of the stores that I had over my forty years in business. Oh, people know people....

Q: Sure.

A: But I had a closeness that made it possible to understand how the president of a store would get me to work for him, without going to Alice Groves and Thorndike Deland. But they came to me, Alice Groves and all of them. (Executive Search Firms).

Q: Did you also place buyers who were not just recent graduates?

A: Oh, I sure did, hundreds, but hundreds. And that's where I got my nucleus of the future presidents. And eventually, I would say that of maybe about four to five hundred important people that I placed, maybe two or five didn't work out.

Q: Um, hm.

A: With a record like that, they ran after me. So much so that what's
her name, wanted to sell me her office or that I should take it over.

A: Yes.
Q: No.
A: Yes. Yes.
Q: Mickey Janis.
A: Mickey Janis. But Mickey was not there at the time. What's the name....

Q: Herb Mines.
A: No, before that.
Q: Well, Lillian Horinbein.
A: Lillian Horinbein. She wanted me to organize the manufacturers, the same as retailers. She said "Dave, I get people as cold as ice in here and look at the money they made. I get you in here, you make one phone call, I'm finished with a job." I said I can't do it. I've got a....

Q: A business to run.
A: A seven, eight million dollar business. I'm making five hundred thousand dollars a year. What've I got to do with your business? She says, "never mind, some day your business will be no good, and my business will be good." She told me that. She was like a soothsayer. But sure enough. I'll never forget, I didn't buy it. Then, oh. then I wanted to buy it. But she wanted a million dollars.

Q: Um, hm.
A: ...I offered her three hundred thousand and I don't need....So Herb Mines bought it for a half a million.
Q: Right, yes, I heard.
A: That's a different....
Q: Yeah.
A: Different story all together. And all the people that I would have taken with me are now partners in that business.
Q: Right. Let's go back just a minute, since you started talking about FIT. When the school was founded, there were some people involved, like Morris Haft.
A: Now, I didn't know Morris Haft. I was not there at the founding of the college. I had my own business to run. There were six people that started that college. Morris Haft was really a leader.
Q: Um. Hm.
A: Sammy Deitsch, what's his name from the dress house, Sam Zahn....
Q: Yes, right.
A: You know, those people. It took several years before the legislature....
Q: The state legislature of New York?
A: ...decided to give it a charter and try it out. Didn't think it would work. That's when I came in. Shirley was here already. Shirley was here before I came in.
Q: Yeah.
A: It started as a manufacturer's school.
Q: Right. Right.
A: We had no place to go to get help for our industry. The retailers had NYU, CCNY, all kinds of schools, dozens of them. We didn't have one.
Q: Right.
A: And I was convinced that this was the place we have to have as an industry if I'm going to stay in it. In 1950, I think it was, is when we started to move up the ladder. I brought Sidney Blauner in, I brought this one in, that one in, all kinds of new people, new blood came in, you know. As a manufacturer it was very easy for me to have entree to various corporations, various companies. We had good presidents that I worked under.

Q: And actually, of course, you weren't being paid by the school, were you?
A: Never.

Q: No, right.
A: I never got a dollar. I don't intend to get a dollar. If they gave me a dollar I'd give it back.

Q: You were working as a volunteer, really, to help set up.
A: Strict. What I thought was going to be a one, a two, a three year job, turned out to be a lifetime proposition. No regrets, but I found myself worrying more about the school than I was worrying about my own business. But, I also found that it was helping me tremendously. Everything was done Dave, you have to this, Dave, you have to this....

Q: Yeah.
A: ...Things like that. And those other people that I didn't know, came into the school gradually. First thing I knew I looked around my, "this is the creme de la creme. The best in America, look who's, we got here that's helping FIT." And we decided to do something more than just run a school. And we did.
Marvin Feldman did it. Made it in to a four year college. I can't take anything away from him; he knew Albany; he knew Washington; he knew his connections; he is absolutely the most fabulous man I have ever met. But Marvin can control the whole thing. He has everything in his hands. From 1955 to 1964, I was Chairman of the Board of the Educational Foundation. I was President of the Foundation before that.

Q: Um, Hm.
A: I was Executive Head of the Board and then Morris died and I was voted in...as a trustee in '65 and Chairman of the Board of Trustees in '68.

Q: Morris Haft?
A: Haft. With the result that nobody in his lifetime can ever, ever duplicate the four important jobs that I had with the school,

Q: Um, hm.
A: ....All for the good of the school.

Q: Right.
A: Didn't mean a thing anymore to me because my business was good. Money I was making. All I could do is further my friendships with all these different heads of institutions. Then we started to get in manufacturers. And what came reluctantly in the beginning, came with a rush the minute they saw that they could help themselves even further because, the company that bought Izod.....

Q: Crystal, David Crystal.
A: They didn't know us. The minute they took over, Crystal.

Q: Oh, General Mills, you mean?
A: General Mills.
Q: Right.
A: Bingo. Somebody came down from there. Who are you people, I see we give you ten thousand dollars a year, and question us. Before we're through, we get a hundred thousand dollars a year. They're there four times a year for meeting and the best friends we got.

Q: Right. So FIT really became a major factor in the industry?
A: All the way through. With the result that the manufacturers, get not only a school, they get an institution.

Q: Sure.
A: One of the greatest men for FIT was Burt Reinitz. You must have known ...

Q: Burt Reinitz? How do you spell Reinitz?
A: R-e-i-n-i-t-z.
Q: I don't think I do.
A: Well he was publicity director for one of our coat and suit associations.

Q: I see, um hm.
A: But he loved the school. He brought me in. He brought Sam Wersba and what's his name.

Q: Deitsch and Coppolo.
A: And Andrew Goodman.....came to me with a proposition that Andrew Goodman's father....

Q: Edwin.
A: ...Edwin would like to give us enough stock to give us ten thou-
sand dollars a year for scholarships. We never had gifts like that, that's all.

We put Andrew on the Board. He's been one of the best, he's the longest on the Board. He's there before me because I was Chairman or President of the Foundation.

Q: Right, right.

A: But, Morris Haft said to me, "one of these days if I die, you're going to take my place." Sure enough when he died, he left word with enough people on the Board to vote me in.

Q: And when you retired from your business, you really went to FIT almost full time didn't you?

A: Yeah. Now I used to go to FIT twice a week, before I retired. Twice a week means in the afternoons at four o'clock (no more at eight thirty, nine o'clock) so that it wouldn't interfere with my business.

Q: Right, right.

A: Now outside of my illness, I've been there almost every single day. Even now, when the executives are all away, I'm there every morning. I was there this morning. And, I don't butt into the operations of the college. But they had a decision to make, "Mr. Zelinka what do you think?" I made the decision. They don't have to take it, but I make the decision right. With the result that now I find myself at least three days a week, from ten until two or three at the school. I was away seven months with my illness....

Q: Right.

A: ...I stepped in as though I wasn't a day away. I never saw anything like it. I wanted to resign because of my health, but they wouldn't let me resign, so they just voted me in as Chairman, again. And I'm going to do everything I can, of course, but there must come a day when that's the end....

Q: When somebody else will take over for your....
A: ...have to.

Q: ...everyday activities. Yeah, right. Um, Dave, before we finish for the day, I just was wondering if you would like to, as long as we're talking about FIT, what about telling what you think would be of interest to students as far as how to get started in the business when they finish their studies. What should students do who are design students, or who are production students?

A: You've asked probably one of the most important single questions that can come out of this whole conversation. Now we're going to start a new curriculum, what we call en....

Q: The new course is in entrepreneurship.

A: Strictly, in conjunction with the ability to learn. That will come in with every single facet of FIT. We're graduating too many students who don't know what the hell to do after they graduate. This is so important, that we must make a special subject of that one idea. And we're going to bring in the best we have to teach them in small doses how they can go in business for themselves and not work for somebody else because we find that we added at least twenty thousand students or people a year to the market from FIT every year. In other words, you don't have to be a graduate to become part of FIT. If you're a graduate, and you want to go in business and you open a little shop, you must hire people, so we figured out that if you take a thousand out of our two thousand graduates who start business for themselves, we get four or five extras working for them and they can go to school at night and learn but we ask, we're adding to work force....

Q: Yes.

A: ...At least twenty thousand students a year or people who help make FIT important because they're all learning. And you can't graduate FIT and be big. It's impossible, you'll go broke in no time. So you can go to work for
somebody so you're part of somebody elses'.....

Q: Um, hm.

A: ...Then you leave, you start and you hire four people, three people, seven people, five people with the result we're providing jobs, not only for those who graduate but those who work for the graduates.

Q: So what you're saying is that the graduates get some experience first, and then with the help of the courses in entrepreneurship they, themselves will know how to start up businesses so they can hire other people.

A: They must know finances. They must know how to borrow money. They must know how to spend money. They must know what the hell they're doing or the little money they've got is wiped away.

Q: So they must know how to budget; they must know how to plan.

A: That's the answer. And we're working on a project now that'll open up. They'll get credit for it, and they're going to come out with at least three to six months of experience in dealing with employers, managers, with other people so they don't come, in saying, "I'm from FIT and I just graduated, here's my...will you give me a job". No. You can't get a job with that, you have to know what the hell you are doing and what you're talking about. And this is where we have to teach them otherwise they're going to be no good to anybody.

Q: So that's a very exciting new program for FIT and that's coming up in the very near....

A: Yes.

Q: ....future.

A: Yes.
Q: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

End of Tape 1, Side 2
Q: Dave, at the beginning of our interviews, you talked about the union coming into your parents business in the very early part of this century when you were quite young. But we haven't talked about union activities later on. So would you like to describe what happens with the unions when you were in your own business and perhaps even before you were in your own business.

A: The union problem began with me when I went into business myself. I had no problem until that time. When I went into business, I became very active because I believe in unionization. I believe in it. I thought that the whole hope of the industry was the fact that they were able to take human beings and put them together with one voice and perhaps make them better workers, better anything that you could call them, but they were better with a union than to leave them float by themselves. Floating by themselves is what you got in Chainatown right now, and can't settle. You get too many individual people. With the union, I had to go to the union immediately as I went into business with Matlick. First of all, I was in the union before I went in with Matlick for a very short time. But I was in business with a man who didn't believe in unions and therefore he did things that I thought was wrong like playing cards on Friday after payroll, and taking their payroll money away from them since he was such a card shark. That was not a good thing for my industry or my business because the men later on took it back from me in some other way. Being in business, at first I tried to do unionization as I thought it would be best for me. It didn't work out that way because.....

Q: What was the way?

A: ... The way is that an individual concern should have a union contract but not everybody at one time. There is no use taking four hundred or five
hundred firms with five hundred ideas and five hundred ways of doing business, and trying to put them under one contract and then bringing all the heartaches that go with unionizing that kind of a grouping. So I thought they should do it one at a time, or ten at a time but not four hundred or five hundred. The proof of the pudding is they get nothing but trouble all the way through because they're fighting amongst themselves. However....

Q: The workers fighting amongst themselves...
A: Yes.
Q: ...or the manufacturers?
A: No, uh, both. The workers are fighting because they don't think they're getting enough payroll; they don't think they're getting enough retirement pay. They are not; they're absolutely not getting it. But the union is giving them the best that they could. I was on the union's trust fund--industry member. The only member from industry that represented the industry where your unions were concerned and I found out that they had something like two billion dollars laying around in investments which they used the interest....

Q: Interest.
A: ...interests to pay people off. Now when a worker wanted to retire, he couldn't get more than a hundred dollars a month. They pay that same thing today and they paid them twenty years ago the same amount. It was wrong, but now they can't help themselves because they lost a lot of that money in investments. They bought government bonds that today you get twelve percent; they bought it for three percent twenty years ago. And uh, I tried to straighten it out as a member of the industry. I suggested what I could, but they wouldn't listen; they were too...
powerful to let me as an individual try to step in to straighten out what I thought was wrong. They have two people working for them all the time, on all these accounts, all these investments, and they've done very, very badly with the result that the workers have lost that money not through any fault of their own, just through the fault of the union being a bad setup for the purpose they were started for. And I hope some day if I'm still alive, to be able to have some input in straightening out this particular fault.

Q: Now, Dave, how would that have differed if they had been unionized as you thought was right in much smaller groups?

A: Well, in the first place, you could settle your problems very quickly in small groups. Large groups I had to straighten out and I was on the team that worked up all the contracts with David Dubinsky over thirty three years. Three years at a time, ten contracts. I had everything to go with all those contracts. The result was that we had no power as manufacturers and we were arguing from weakness and the union was able to do everything in their power to do what they wanted....

Q: Because there were so many of them?

A: Not only that, but I was an individual. I represented my group, it's true. And every one of the associations had a group, but we had thousands of people. Nobody knew what the hell the other one was doing, with the result when they put us together to settle a contract, anybody that said, "no" had his hands full because nobody was there to help them.

Q: You mean the manufacturer who said no?

A: Yes, that's right.
Q. So you're saying that the manufacturers really came off badly?
A: Very badly. No union in the world was as badly run as the ILGWU.

Q: But it sounds to me as though they were run from the workers point of view. They seem to have been run all right.
A: No, they were not. They were run from the union's point of view. The workers only took what the union gave them.

Q: But the union was there in order to defend and protect....
A: Yes they were....
Q: ...the workers.
A: ...that's true.
Q: And they succeeded in that, apparently.
A: They succeeded but they never came off the way they should have because they had too many problems to settle with too many people in too many industries. When they had to pay out retirement pay, they did not have the money to pay these people. And these people retired on much less than half of what they should have gotten as a worker. They put down certain rules that you had to be with a concern twenty years before you were entitled to retirement pay. Who the hell ever heard of such a thing?

Q: Look, Dave, I don't understand though. If the manufacturers had more to say about it, would that have been different?
A: Sure.
Q: Why?
A: Because we'd have said more.
Q: And would you have said it should be that a worker does not have to be there that long....
A: Absolutely...
Q: ...to get paid?
A: A worker was with me ten years, was entitled to that ten years of retirement pay, not twenty years, not five years. He worked for me ten years. I paid for him for ten years. They'd never give him a cent out of the ten years. Only if you were there twenty years.
Q: So you're saying that the manufacturers would have seen things differently if they had had more to say about the contract.
A: No question about that.
Q: Well do you think you represent the feelings of many manufacturers?
A: I certainly did but we talked amongst ourselves; we talked quietly because we didn't want to have any trouble with the union. Because if we got too smart or we had too much to say, the union used to step in and stop the shops and talk to us, "what kind of troublemakers are we?" They called us troublemakers when we went against their principles. The union knows my feelings. It didn't help me in my business and didn't it hurt me; let's say. But the workers never came off what they should've gotten as union workers.
Q: Dave, you, you bring up something interesting which I hadn't thought of discussing with you but I'd like to. How do you feel that this whole business of off shore production got started, and did it have any impact in the coat market?
A: Yes. Off shore is merely a title to permit you to make mer-
chandise away from your own country so that you can finish the garment somewhere else and ship it in as a product of another country or let's say a commonwealth of the United States. Off shore has its own connotation. The Virgin Islands is off shore. It's our country, but yet if you make it in the Virgin Islands you bring it in at half price because the Virgin Islands, Islanders only get half price for their work. We used to take a garment and put it together in Poland, let's say.....

Q: Did you work with Poland?
A: Yes.
Q: Yes.
A: We brought it in to the Virgin Islands. They sewed up the linings, they put on buttons, whatever they had to do. The duty on this was half of what would happen if we brought it directly from Poland. So this was another scheme of getting merchandise made in a nefarious way, which the United States countenanced because they didn't know any better. Or they would raise holy hell if anybody had something to say. You take Mexico. All we do is cut the garments, ship them across the border thirty miles, put it together in Mexico, ship it back again as a Mexican product, except we have to pay for cutting. The result was that we had to lose our business to foreign merchants no matter who they were.

Q: When did this start in the coat market would you say?
A: It started during the Kennedy administration. David Dubinsky asked me and President Kennedy both asked me would I go to Europe, would I look up the following subject and bring in the report. I spent two months working on foreign imports and how they affect the United States. It didn't do me one bit
of good. Whatever suggestions I made, they kept somewheres in Washington or the ILGWU didn't want to have any trouble with the President, and the result was they continued to do everything that my report showed was wrong.

Q: Let me, I'm sorry, this is important, now you've opened a big subject here. You are saying somewhere around 1960 you went to Europe.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you spent a couple of months....

A: At the expense....

Q: ...doing a report.

A: ...of the union, and the government paid for my expenses....

Q: And you went to Eastern Europe?

A: I went all over. My most important stop, they wanted to open an office in London, Paris and Italy. And I talked them out of that because I couldn't see a reason to have an office in a foreign country....

Q: That would be to encourage exports I assume?

A: Yes. But Kennedy said to us, "I want exports from this country to grow and we'll pay for any information that will help us." I was picked as one of the people to do it. There were two others but they left me alone so I finished my job. And I found out all these things going from one place to another.

Q: But you went to Poland, and Romania?

A: Yeah.

Q: That kind of country, Hungary?

A: Hungary. Holland and Belgium were very interesting countries because, as a matter of fact I was the United States ambassador, textile ambassador
to Belgium. The Belgium government....

Q: I'm sorry, who was the textile ambassador?
A: I was.
Q: You were.
A: They gave me that title; they gave me a plane and they sent me to Belgium to see what I could do for the Belgians. After five years of working for them I found out that Holland can ship the goods into Belgium cheaper than they could themselves....

Q: Than they could manufacture it themselves.
A: Themselves. And this related to us because at the bottom of the barrel was USA. We were the most expensive country in the world delivering ready-to-wear. The other countries, all these countries: Japan and China and Belgium and all of 'em....

Q: Wait a minute. At that time you didn't go to the Orient though so we'll....
A: No.
Q: Let's talk about the Orient separately. In Europe you found out that they....
A: Found out that all....
Q: ...produce the clothes....
A: ...of a sudden they didn't let our merchandise come into the country. They put walls up, powerful walls up that was too much for us to open them with the result we couldn't ship over seas.
Q: Um.
A: What we're doing in the last three years is nothing. We've lost our momentum with the result that... at that time, I called it to the union's attention. Henoch Mendelsund came up to my place of business with the union officials so I said, "listen, listen this is what I'm importing from Holland. This is what the United States has to charge."

Q: Um, hm.

A: I showed them through. I could sell the one garment for twenty dollars less than the other, and the European garment was made better than ours. All he said to me was to please do him a favor and not publicize the fact yet. He was going to do something about it and he didn't want whatever I had to say to come out. So they kept me quiet for years, and by the time I had something to say, it was too late to correct a situation that I saw coming twenty years earlier. And all of my licensees not only were bigger than me, but they made better garments than I did.

Q: Gee.

A: I saw what they'd been making. They shipped me all the merchandise. I brought in 6,000 coats from Holland when I found out. And the union says you can't do it, but this time we'll let you do it but don't do it again. Meanwhile, I made fifty dollars a garment. I made more money importing than I did making my own garment.

Q: Did you ever have anything made in, or imported from the Orient? Did you go to Korea or Taiwan?

A: No.

Q: No.
A: No. I never, never,....but....

Q: There are raincoats coming in from there, aren't there?

A: They're from all over. There's a hole in the wall in every single country and in Japan, in Hong Kong. I brought home tons of goods from Hong Kong but nobody stopped me. I did what I could. I saw my competitors: for years my competitors were slicing my head off. And when I went to the union they said, "Look, you're the president of the Association, you shouldn't do it". What was I going to do? All my competitors are bringing in all these finished goods. I did some but nothing compared to all these bigshots today. They brag about it. That's what saved their business.

Q: Sure. What do you think's going to be the future of the manufacturing of apparel in this country?

A: Nothing will be made in New York or the East, nothing. It will be made in the South, over the border, or in some foreign country that's friendly to us.because we have some kind of reciprocal arrangement that they need us for something, so we'll give them the right to manufacture, let's say ladies' apparel.... or something like that. Most of your people today are not manufacturing today. Ninety percent of Calvin Klein, Lauren, all these famous names--they're not making anything in the United States. Everybody.....

Q: Except their samples lines.

A: Yeah. The sample line....

Q: I guess....

A: Forget the sample line.

Q: Yeah, right.
A: That I have to make here. Korea is growing like you can't stop it. It's like Jack in the Beanstalk. It's outdoing all of them. Singapore, all of a sudden...I was in Singapore about ten years ago and I, I said to myself, "Dammit, I ought to open a factory here in Singapore; look at the beautiful garments they're making here. Well, I was talked out of it. Who wants to go to Singapore.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: ...You have revolutions and you lose all your capital. As it turns out, Singapore today is number one.

Q: Sure.

A: Korea is number two.

Q: Really.

A: Hong Kong is number three. Japan is number four.

Q: What about Taiwan?

A: What? Oh and Taiwan.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: There's your countries. Now you want to specialize in raincoats, or an item that you don't manufacture in the East....

Q: Quilted coats, for example.

A: Nothing is made here. Quilted coats, don't joke, they don't even make them in New York. They go to Denver. A man in Denver has a machine....

Q: Um, hm.

A: He's so used to making for the West....

Q: Yeah, right.
A: That he turns them out like bum, bum, bum, bum....

Q: So you really see no future in New York....
A: No.

Q: ...except for designing and patternmaking and cutting perhaps.
A: That's all.

Q: Do you think the cutting will stay here?
A: Well, the cutting if it's easy, if it's not intricate, can be cut away from here very easily, because the machinery they've got today, laser beams, other objects do your cutting for you. The minute you get into anything that's complicated, they have to make it around here because we make the most difficult things here. We've got the workers here. And they're dying off.

Q: So we'll have fewer of those workers.
A: Every year you get fewer and fewer. Look at the union totals--You'll see. They went from four hundred and sixty five thousand to about one hundred and seventy five thousand.

Q: Four hundred and sixty five thousand about ten years ago?
A: Yeah.

*Q: To a hundred and seventy five thousand. I've seen those figures.
A: So I have no hope for New York at all. People can say and brag, but right now New York is in the worst trouble I have ever seen in the fifty years that I'm in business. Maybe there's five, maybe three manufacturers doing well, but thousands of manufacturers are starving. They are losing money like drunken sailors, and by next year, even those that are successful are going to have trouble all the way through. With the result, I have nothing but heartaches to talk about when it comes to the New York.....

*According to official ILGWU figures, membership is over 250,000.
Q: Um, um hm.

A: ...picture. Unless a miracle happens. The union now is forcing them for increases. That's all right. They're all, everybody is entitled to an increase. You've got to earn it. You've got to make it. Have to manufacture it. The retailers are not buying anything; they're cautious. And with the result that the union today, no matter, they can't keep quiet on imports. I don't care what you do, it's only you pay your dues, the worker's fines and everything else. But the union is nothing compared to what they were. And they weren't getting worse. And the day will come, maybe in my lifetime, this whole thing will have to change around. They can't go on....

Q: Dave, the hundred and sixty thousand people who are still in the industry, the workers, what do they do? What businesses, what kinds of businesses are they in?

A: Well they work all over....

Q: Intimate apparel?

A: In the Bronx, you've got blouses....

Q: I see, I see.

A: ...In Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the bearded, the....

Q: Hasidim.

A: Hasidim...They work on something else. You've got Brownsville something else, the Bronx....

Q: I wonder what the merchandise is that's being made here by these hundred and sixty thousand people.

A: Well, there's some, many of the things they make here today can't
be made so easily out of New York.

Q: You're talking about things which are made in small quantities...
A: Yes.
Q: ...Special lots.
A: Ye..., No... all large quantities. Abe Schrader for instance the other day, I saw a garment he made, well he has to have special people who make them because there are pleats in the front....
Q: Um, hm.
A: ...They don't make pleats in Europe unless you show them and make them and you got a machine to do them. Anything that has any hand work....
Q: Um, hm.
A: ...of any kind still has to be made by local people; and the local people are not working. If you say working, three months, four months, they're starving; they have no jobs. In September they'll all be laid off, and again will sit around for four months wondering what to do with uh, people, or what to make and how, and what to do. And you've got a very serious problem; but I'm out of business seven years....
Q: Well, but you're still very much involved you know with....
A: But, I, I talk to everybody on the street, I can't get a voice of encouragement anywheres. I go to a barber shop; my manicurist tells me this is the worst she's ever seen. She used to get sixty customers on a Friday, she....
Q: This isn't one of the garment district buildings?
A: Yeah. So this time they had twenty two. You know, you, it's, it's just a a horrible situation and you can talk to any manufacturer you want.
Q: Um, hm.
A: Bromley, the oldest firm in business.
Q: Bromley, the...
A: I think they're going out. Not because of money; they can't manipulate; they can't run their business. They are making too many items. When they made coats, they were terrific, Suits, and coats and skirts, and fur-lined coats, this, that. The father says he has had it; he can't go on. The most successful name you've got now is Fairbrook.
Q: Fairbrook.
A: Yeah. Frederick Fairbrook. Schrader is very busy, but he's going to get hurt. Their manufacturers are going to do this to him because he got stuck with four thousand coats last year and sold them to Loehmann's.
Q: Um, hm.
A: At the height of the season, I'm talking about September, and all the customers in twenty two states felt that sale. So, uh, you can't cut stock; yet if you don't cut it, your cuttings are small, so you have to pay more.
Q: Right. And they don't have reorders.
A: There is no such thing as a reorders now. Nobody here can reorder; they reorder two pieces, four pieces, six pieces, where's the hundreds we used to get as manufacturers. Nobody is stocking goods. Bloomingdales is buying two at a time. They don't want any inventory, and that's why it's going to be too late. In September when business is always up, they're going to have no stock.
Q: So that when you see it now, the industry is able to maintain
sample rooms to make their collections, they have salesmen to sell the merchandise, they have distribution centers, I suppose, to distribute the merchandise when it comes in, but the actual manufacture, once the merchandise has been cut is done somewheres else.

A: Absolutely.

Q: So that from the union point of view, the union workers will probably continue to decrease except for such people as work on special kinds of merchandise.

A: That's exactly the way I see it. And the union people have children they don't want to enter this industry. There is nothing to encourage anybody to come into this industry.

Q: Um, hm.

A: And that's why FIT is today specializing....

Q: Yes.

A: ...in management.

Q: Um, hm.

A: Not in workers.

Q: Right.

A: That's why, the union has asked us to put in a sewing, cutting, labor subject, so we make more workers for them. We said yes, so we're doing it. It's not working out at all. The people are not registering for that course at all.

Q: Um, hm.

A: At night, yes, but day students--they run like hell.

Q: Okay, Dave, um. Let's change the subject a little bit. I'd like
to talk a little bit about philanthropy. Because this is an industry which has been very, really very famous for all of its philanthropic endeavors. Now, I know that you have spent so much of your time, and effort and money for FIT but can you talk at all about some of the other sorts of philanthropies that perhaps you've been involved with or you know other people in the industry have been.

A: Yes. I know most of the big givers in the industry. Most of these people were big givers in the last ten years when business was good. Before that we used to have all kinds of organizations to raise money. I was a joiner. Red Cross and the hospitals, whatever it was, that was part of my life. I've seen all these people who give money. But mostly today we're giving money in the big scale only when we got a big business at a big profit. Nobody is giving money from capital. Everybody is giving it wherever they can take it. And some of the big givers are retailers.

Q: Um, hm.

A: Manufacturers are getting smaller and smaller. They don't have the money to give anymore, with the result that we have to tighten our belts on many projects. It was ordinarily nothing to call up a friend in the retail business or the manufacturing and tell him you need thirty thousand, forty thousand for this charity, you got it-- not today. And the trouble is today a lot of good companies are also selling the companies. Take Kimberly. They sold to....

Q: General Mills.

A: ...General Mills. And General Mills has a separate department
for giving. They sometimes don't see the apparel industry as a place to give your money and they give us money but not, nothing like what we used to get from some of the people who are individuals successfully in their own business.

Q: Yeah, entrepreneurs are really a world...

A: That's right, that's correct. So that anybody who sold his business you cannot get the money.

Q: Of course, some of the big families have foundations like Dave Schwartz's foundation which gives a lot of money and the Pomerantz foundation....

A: Yes.

Q: ...gives a lot of money. So that the nature of giving has changed.

A: That's what you're up against today. You don't get the money you used to years ago. Today we sell tickets for a dinner. This one was exceptional, the one we did at FIT. We used to sell a thousand tickets, the one we did at FIT. We used to sell a thousand tickets, three hundred thousand dollars. We sold maybe a hundred and ninety thousand. But the money was made up by Givenchy....

Q: Um, hm.

A: ...he gave a very big contribution. On top of that, all those who wanted to praise him and raise money, gave a hundred thousand dollars in his name because he was the guest of honor.

Q: Right, right.

A: But, how many can you get like that.

Q: So, you see the future of philanthropy as being a very limited one...

A: Very.
Q: ...Or changing one in this industry?
A: Absolutely. No question about it. And we have to turn more
to the New York State and New York City for our help.
Q: It's up to the governments to help. Yeah.
A: And they're cutting down.
Q: Yeah, right, exactly. Yes, they're cutting down, too. So that...
A: It's a very, very ticklish subject we're on because it's very
difficult to find an answer.
Q: Dave, I thank you very much; this has really been very interesting
and I think very complete, so thank you.
A: You are welcome.

End of Tape 2, Side 1
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