

Interview with Jack Lebewohl, Second Avenue Deli, 07/27/17

Part I, talking at table with Jonathan Boyarin and Gavriel Bellino

[01/03]

Bantering: JL: How do you make a flood?

EJS: That's a nice variation on the theme (an old insurance joke).

EJS: With your permission, I'm going to ask you a little bit about Yiddish Theater and your brother Abe, about how he fell in love so to speak with the Yiddish Theater. Did that happen first in Europe, in Lemberg (L'viv), or did it happen after the War, because in 1954 he's opening this Deli on Second Avenue.

JL: I'll tell you. My brother was 8 years old when World War II started. He and my mother are sent to Kazakhstan; and my father was sent to Siberia. So my brother didn't have an opportunity to taste the Yiddish theater in Lemberg, Lvov. He definitely didn't have an opportunity to taste the Yiddish theater in Kazakhstan. And post-War, when he got back to Poland and the D.P. camp, there was no Yiddish theater. He scrambled to stay alive; that's all he really did. When he came to the United States, in 1950, he scrambled to make a living; he definitely didn't have the time or money to go to the Yiddish Theater.

His first exposure to "the Yiddish theater," was on Second Avenue in 1954 when he opened up the Second Avenue Deli. Then all of a sudden he started to meet people associated with the Yiddish theater, and you got to remember, that the Yiddish theater was passed its heyday and prime. You had the Anderson Theater, at that time that was the only theater that was left, maybe

EJS: you had a little bit at the Jaffee, on and off, and at the Loew's Commodore East, which became the Fillmore East, but it's on and off,

JL: totally insignificant. My brother was more exposed to the off-Broadway that was going on on Second Avenue at that time. As a matter of fact, right in that corner there's a picture of Eli Wallach and his wife [Anne Jackson], and that was his first exposure. There's a picture somewhere around here of Milton Berle since he did something else in that area.

JB: And they started coming in?

JL: What was left of the Yiddish theater, ... so you had the Reichtzeit brothers, Miriam Kressyn, Zvi Schooler, Lilianne Lux, ... and others who were there also. He got to know them. And he heard the stories, and that's basically how he became interested in the Yiddish theater. So when he got the idea for the Stars, he went to

EJS: Silver Brothers [granite monument—*matzveah*—makers on Stanton Street and Essex Street]

JL: He went to Seymour Reichtzeit [head of the nearby Hebrew Actors Union at 31 E. 7th Street]

EJS: He went to Seymour to get the names

JL: Now here's the funny part. There's one person who was inadvertently left out by him. Feyvush Finkel.

EJS: and Seymour had a grudge against Feyvush.

JL: They considered Feyvush not part of the real Yiddish theater.

Because he also came at the end of it; he was younger.

EJS: If you couldn't bear a grudge, what's an actor?

JL: That's not the way it started. Feyvush got angry with my brother and blamed my brother for not having a Sheytn (Star) here. So my brother said, don't blame me, blame the Hebrew Actors Union, I took everything from them.

My brother happened to enjoy a whole army of the theaters on Second Avenue. In fact, the theater on 12th Street and Second Avenue [the Jaffee], I don't know if you remember, after there was the Yiddish theater had its heyday it was no longer, Ann Corio's "This was Burlesque" was in there and I don't remember how many years her show went on. I remember I was still a kid, my brother would go into the theater, and sit in the back, and go to sleep. I remember once going in with him, as a kid.

EJS: Now your brother opens the Deli in 1954-1955, and it's the smaller part of the Deli. When does he get the idea that he should be putting the Stars there as he's starts thinking about them ... starts meeting people, starts learning about their history, and they become real to him in some ways. Because some of them are long gone and some like Molly Picon are very much alive and well and he gets to know.

JL: 1973 he got the idea about enlarging the store, and took over the two adjoining stores. Then in 1978, he took over whatever was left...

EJS: of the candy store?

JL: He took over everything but the candy store, and he called it the Molly Picon room. And then... in the early mid-1980s, he put in the Stars [1984], he got the idea. He approached Rechtzeit and that's how they did it.

EJS: And Feyvush got his Star about three years later?

JL: No. Feyvush got his Star after my brother was shot [1996]. I did that.

EJS: Aah. Seymour was already ...

JL: Right. It didn't make a difference. I remember Lilianne Lux was there and she said "look at this; we all have to share our Stars and Feyvush is there by himself."

JL: Feyvush, we did up front at the end.

EJS: And Lilianne was there with her husband so to speak on the Star, Pesach Burstyn. Did Mike show up too, their son? It's nice that Lilianne did. I told you on the phone that I had found the plaque for Pesach at the Bialystoker Center and Home for the Aged [228 East Broadway] and mailed it to Mike...

JB: Does Leon Liebgold have a plaque [Star]? He was Khonen in the Dybuk.

JL: I think so.

EJS: Yes he does.

JL: And just to let you know by the time my brother did it, they were all dead.

EJS: And that's part of what's so interesting; someone like Goldfadn gets chosen because *Rechtzeit* and everybody who knows the history of Yiddish theater, they need a founding figure and Goldfaden is a good choice. He writes the plays, he starts in Yassig; he deals with the Czar, he comes to New York. Everyone in New York and in Europe knew him. There are other people who get chosen because they have a storied history, but in some ways it's also a little arbitrary about *Rechtzeit* getting to decide who gets to have a story.

JL: He picked the people.

EJS: Mina Bern he liked obviously. Leibgold he liked. Miriam Kressyn, he liked.

JL: He should have liked Miriam Kressyn: you know that they were married.

EJS: Of course. Exactly. Who knows what she would have done *if* he didn't choose her?

EJS: I do remember that Jonathan and I got to go see a production that your brother sponsored with the National Yiddish Arts Theater, that's how they translated it into English. It was a production in Yiddish and it was *Tvishn Tzvi Veltn*, or *Between Two Worlds*, which is a.k.a, *The Dybuk*, and it was actually an excellent production not least because it starred Zvee Schooler from Community Synagogue.

JB: He was the *meshulach* (the messenger). *Dus is Aryin in Mir, a D-YYY-buk!* It was really scary.

JL: BTW, Zvee Schooler was not an *Am HaAretz* (Jewish ignoramus)

JB: No, he was brilliant. She got me, a few years ago they made CDs, CDs of some of his recordings from WEVD [as] the *Grammeister*, the Rhyme Master. Brilliant 8-10 minute monologues.

JL: he was brilliant...

EJS: Zvee Schooler, I always heard did Yoinah [Jonah], the *maftir*, [the last part of the Torah reading]...

I had heard when you called up Zvee Schooler for an *aliyah*, you had to actually add the term the *Grammeister* [the Rhymmer, his title on his show on WEVD] to it; he didn't just want his Jewish name. He was a bit of a fussy spot which is what you'd expect from a famous actor.

But the production of the *Dybuk* was really quite excellent; it has your brother's name. It has a statement from him in Yiddish and English. And it basically calls for the revival of the Yiddish Theater and says this production is going to do it; it's a National Theater.

JB: I think it was their only production.

JL: Unfortunately, they couldn't get it off the ground.

EJS: It was a great production and your brother sponsored it... And I don't make fun of people for being hopeful in their day; I say those were their hopes, and if their aspirations were good ones, they're noble.

JL: See my brother wanted to do everything and anything to improve the neighborhood; to bring attention to the neighborhood; to bring people to the neighborhood. And he thought that was a very good way of doing it.

EJS: Now some of those actors had studios actually and they were production studios. Remember the Sol Birns building [111 Second Avenue, built 1928]? Sol Birns is also one of the founders of Community Synagogue [1940]. Sol Birns who was a character and a half; he was both a developer and he was in the phonograph business. He *potcked* [messed around] with everything.

JL: He also owned that building on Avenue A and 6th Street on the SW corner. It wasn't a fancy building.

EJS: He got into legal problems with mail order phonographs with immigrants and C.O.D. charges that were not specified on payment plans. But he also ran this recording company and he had his niece run a store that sold pianos and phonographs, Atlantic Talking Machine Company, they were downstairs on the ground floor of the Saul Birns building and they sold sheet music from Yiddish theater. Theater in effect attracts its own secondary types of businesses associated with it. Sheet music was very big; records were very big; souvenir programs were very big; pieces in magazines about the various artists. So you see that a little later as well as in the heyday of Yiddish theater.

[01/03] Saul Birns ...because the Depression hits, which we know was very hard on people, turns that building into a catering hall [Central Plaza] on [111] Second Ave and people start doing bar mitzvahs and weddings there. And then later it turns into a production company space on the top floors, people start using it for TV, and before that for radio, some of the Yiddish theater stuff is in and out of there: the people who are bi-lingual, the crossovers, start using that building so it becomes one of these epicenters, in a post life of Yiddish theater.

JL: Unfortunately, my knowledge of everything is in some ways extremely limited to what I heard as a kid.

JB: Let me ask you this since this was later. You mention your brother's concern for the community. Do you have a sense, was there ever a time when your brother, or you, felt that the Deli itself was threatened because the neighborhood was too dangerous or that people didn't want to come?

JL: I didn't feel that because I was too young. When my brother remodeled the store, the first time in 1973, Rapoport's [Jewish dairy restaurant at 91-93 Second Avenue] had [already] closed across the street. I remember Ratners, which was on [111] Second Avenue, was happy because they closed, they thought they were going to get more business. And my brother said "You're crazy; you're going to go next." [The Second Avenue Ratners closed on May 28, 1974; the Delancey Street Ratners closed in 2002.]

JL: My brother was actually a little nervous, "maybe I screwed up."

JB: By putting money into it

JL: Right. By expanding and putting money into it,

JB: 'Cause he sees other people can't make it.

JL: Then thank God, he did well; in 1978 he built the Molly Picon room. That's it.

JB: That's just after I moved into 5th Street between Second and Third, in August of '78.

JL: I remember, I would say it was in the eighties, I saw you walking in the street

EJS: with a *yamulka* [*kippa*, skullcap]

JL: with a big black *yamulka*.

EJS: Yes, that's Jonathan.

JL: ... And I remember saying, someone *frum* [religious] in the neighborhood. ... I should contact him and get him to come to Community [Synagogue]. And then I found out that you were going to Eighth Street and that was it.

EJS: We walked into ...

JB: 'Cause I met Elissa soon after. We came into Community once... It was a nice room but we didn't get the sense that anyone noticed that we had walked in.

JL: The problem that you had at that time was that it was a bunch of *alter cockers*. They were somewhat strident and that's the way they were.

JB: They were who they were and they didn't need anybody.

EJS: We went to the Talmud classes there occasionally because they weren't bad.

JL: My brother had his *aufruf* at Community and I remember, it was mid-late June 1955 or '57, ...the Shul was empty. There was no one there.

JB: That early, the fifties already.

JL: The reason it was empty was very simple. It was an Orthodox Shul but most people were not religious. They didn't go to Shul. They went to Shul on *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*; that was it.

EJS: I'd like to go back a bit to Abe. One of the things that is so interesting about Yiddish folksongs is that they got mixed with the popular music from Yiddish theater. When you look at the Yiddish theater songs, yes, there were professional composers like Segunda and the rest but a lot of what goes into Yiddish theater, they'll take a melody that's already known from a folk song, or take a couple of words that people will recognize, and then they'll professionalize it. But the opposite thing also happens; the lullabies from the Yiddish theater come into the folk repertoire. The whole thing becomes a lovely little tangle in which it is very hard to separate what's folk music or not by the time you finish.

JB: *Dona Dona* becomes a folk song.

JL: It becomes mixed up. My *Yiddishe Mama*

EJS: Exactly. Which is clearly not in its origins a folk song and we have Tucker belting it out.

JL: And *By mir bist du sheyn*, that's swing.

JB: And the *rebbe Elimelech* people think is a Chasidic song.

EJS: Even though it's making fun of Chasidim and it's from theater. And Lubavitch, by the way, when they go around in those little trucks, and they broadcast it

JB: that's what they play.

JL: And with Lubavitch, they have adopted so many of their *nigunim* [religious melodies] totally secular songs. "Napoleon's March."

EJS: So when you say your brother was not familiar with Yiddish theater

JL: I'm saying that he was not [previously] familiar with its history or its culture, that's all

EJS: rather than with its productions. So, I'm going to take that for granted, but I'm also going to take for granted, unless you tell me otherwise, that your brother liked a good song.

JL: Of course; we all did. My mother liked the Yiddish theater and I went with her to the Anderson Theater [66 Second Avenue] to see shows. My father did not go to Yiddish theater.

EJS: You mentioned that you had seen *Yoshe Kalb* for instance

JB: Did your parents basically raise you—I'm not asking about your brother—in English or in Yiddish.

JL: Yiddish. I didn't speak a word of English until I was six years old until I started at *Torah VoDaas* [in Williamsburg, a.k.a. Yeshiva Torah Vodaas]

EJS: But in *Torah VoDaas* it was useful to know Yiddish

JL: Oh yes and no, ...In fact, what I found very interesting was Chumash, Rashi, I learned in Yiddish.

EJS: To *taitch* [translate from Hebrew or Aramaic into Yiddish]

JL: To *taitch*, yeah

JL: Gemara started already in English. By the time I was old enough to start learning Gemara, it was a few years later, ...

JB: The generations were changing... The place was changing already.

JL: It had to.

EJS: Which makes a lot of sense. Now, what did your mother like about Yiddish theater.

JL: She just enjoyed it. She was entertained. It wasn't that she was an aficionado and that she knew the history of Yiddish theater. But she wanted to be entertained plain and simple.

EJS: *Yoshe Kalb* is not an easy one though. There are things that are nostalgia, there are things that are happy in Yiddish theater. *Yoshe Kalb* is a dark sort of story; so your mother's sense of entertainment was broader it sounds like...

JL: I couldn't even answer that. I was too young at that time

JB: to appreciate what was going on in the play

JL: although I understood what was going on...

EJS: Your mother, she went for the entertainment and it sounds like she liked it. Do you have a sense that it got brought it back into the home in a way that Abe might have picked up on?

JL: My mother listened to Yiddish radio.

EJS: EVD [WEVD, a Yiddish radio station, was named for Eugene V Debs]

JL: Of course. Abe Ellstein, what I always got a kick out of, was that he advertised Chef Boyardee, because it was *treyf*. At first I thought Chef Boyardee was kosher. If I'm hearing about it on the radio...

EJS: like Rokeach ads next to Chef Boyardee.

JB: My father when he was a child he found out that Norman Thomas wasn't Jewish, he couldn't believe it.

EJS: Cause, it was on EVD,

JL: He was a socialist

EJS: so how could it not be Jewish?

EJS: Zvee Schooler, *Ihavdl*, remember he used to do those ads on EVD for "Old Rabbis." That was the only thing he said in English: Give to Old Rabbis.

JB: He kept doing the show for the Home of the Sages. "*Shrieft iyar* check tzu Old Rabbis." [Write your check to old Rabbis]

JL: I just don't remember that. I remember he came to the Deli wearing shorts and he had the skinniest legs I had ever seen. When I knew him he was already older. Remember, in the movie Fiddler, he played the rabbi [1971] and he also played in Fiddler on Broadway.

EJS: He was considered a cross over even though he had an accent. There were the people, the Molly Goldbergs of the world or the Zvee Schoolers who could play Yiddish characters. And then there were the people who really crossed over, like Paul Muni, or whomever, who could play either way.

JL: Opatashu. The son, Dave. What was the father's name?

JB: Yosef.

EJS: Who was a great writer. You also had Asch productions.

JL: Sholem Asch. Great Books.

EJS: Great books, and you had a son, Moe Asch who is running all this music stuff all over the place.

JB: Folkways

EJS: One of the things you do see in Yiddish theater is first and second generation, but the second generation may do something different. I got to meet Eugene Segunda at a *shiva* ...

JL: Sholem Segunda's son?

EJS: Yes, He was already older, he was going to the *shiva* of somebody, Mae Silver, whose parents were among the founders of Community Synagogue [325 E. 6th Street] in 1940. Her mother was one of the ladies who gave a thousand bucks. Since I was helping serving the food and Eugene Segunda was busy telling stories about his father, I quietly asked him if the one that people say in the neighborhood was true. Which was 25 bucks for *By Mir Bistu Sheyn*. He said yes, and told me the story of how his father in effect got ripped off on that song. Because it was written for Yiddish theater in Brooklyn, and

when it got picked up by the clubs, his father did not think it was going to be a big deal, and the royalty ended up twenty-five bucks for him...

EJS: Jack, is there something that you want people who read this blog from the NYPL to know about your brother, Yiddish theater, the neighborhood, or anything else?

JL: That's a very broad question. They should know that the neighborhood is a multi-faceted neighborhood. It had every culture; it wasn't just Yiddish Theater. You had Italians, you had Ukrainians, Poles, and all that. My mother told me a story that shows what type of neighborhood it was. When we came into this country in 1950, we stayed at the HIAS. And now remember that I was born in Italy and came from Italy to America, to the HIAS. And we're walking in the street with my mother and she wants to buy me a candy. You have to understand I'm not 2 years old yet. She walks into an Italian grocery store; she was going to get me a piece of candy. And I walk into the store and I go to the owner "bongiorno." And my mother said that the guy melted.

As for the neighborhood, you have all the Ukrainians there. I remember the president of the Ukraine from when the Ukraine split off from the Soviet Union, late eighties, early nineties. The first president of the Ukraine [Leonid Kravchuk] came to New York [1992], he came downtown because of the big Ukrainian community, so my brother and I got to meet him. We told him that the family was from Kulikov (Kulykiv, Lviv Oblast), he said Kilikov Farbrechts, the town was known for the bakery. And it was nice talking.

EJS: I'm going to contradict myself and ask you one last question. What languages did your family have in Europe and in the States? Because if you are in a multi-lingual area in Europe ...

JL: I'll give you all the languages. My parents and my brother included. Polish of course. Now remember, they come from Lemberg, which at that time was part of Poland but because of the Ukraine, they spoke Ukrainian. Then they knew Russian. My father and mother understood some German and spoke some German,

EJS: Because of Austria-Hungary [Lemberg was part of Galicia which belonged to Austria-Hungary prior to WWI]

JL: my brother didn't. Yiddish of course. And then when they got to Kazakhstan, I'm not sure about the local language there if they knew it or not. So most of my brother's education was in Kazakhstan, not in Poland. He just had the first couple of years in Poland. And he received a comprehensive education in Kazakhstan. So even though he finished high school there, but it's really the equivalent of two years of college in America.

EJS: So he came to the States with very good skills linguistically but without English.

JL: Correct.

EJS: And he ended up working in a factory making dentures before he opened the Deli.

JL: Correct. Because he was trained between Kazakhstan and the D.P. camp, he learned how to become a dental mechanic so he'd be able to get a job.

EJS: And support the family.

JL: My father was able to get a job in a factory. My parents did not take a penny from my brother.

EJS: That's very impressive.

JL: Anything he had, they made him put into the bank. In fact, until he got married, they wouldn't take a penny from him for rent or anything like that. Any money he made, they made him put it in the bank.

EJS: And that's what gave him his stakehold for the Deli?

JL: Who knows?

EJS: He won the lottery or played the cards...

JL: It was just different in those days.

EJS: Yes. But they were also good days I hear you.

JL: I did not know that I was poor, that we were poor. I never knew it. I thought that we had everything in the world [and] as far as my parents were concerned and my brother, they did have everything because they survived, they were alive.

JB: There was food.

JL: I don't want to use the word thriving; but in a way they were thriving because of what they had gone through. You know, they worked in factories. My father did manual labor in a factory. I remember how my father was very upset on *Tisha B'Av*, because he had to go to work in the factory. My father he refused to work on *Shabbes* or *yuntif* which is why he was forced to get a menial job in a factory. And he said to me, I just can't take off for *Tisha B'Av*.

EJS: And as we know, most people who were in Lemberg, did not leave Lemberg. So your parents' timing was

JL: They were lucky that the Russians kicked them out.

JL: I was in Israel just a few months ago and I had a private tour of *Yad VShem*. And the woman who was giving us the tour, she asked us to give a little bit of our background before so she'd know what to concentrate on ... so I told her where the family came from and how my mother, my father and my brother survived the War. The look on her face, she was incredulous. Like, how do you survive the War? Nobody with a family survived intact.

JB: Yup.

JL: And I remember that.

EJS: Jack, I'm going to thank you very much.

JL: I hope that I was helpful.

EJS: It was extremely helpful. The Deli is wonderful. Thinking about your brother is something that I think a new generation of fans of Yiddish Theater will find to be very important in their lives, not least because he left them a present, a *matanyeh*, a *yerusha* with those Stars.

JL: Look at that section at some of the posters in the restaurant; you'll be amazed.

Part II, looking at wall posters from Yiddish Theater, and photos of Molly Picon [03/03]

EJS: I'm looking at a poster from the McKinley Square Theater, Boston Road and 169th Street

JL: That's the Bronx BTW,

EJS: That's what I'm about to say; It's not Brooklyn, It's not Second Avenue, It's not the Rialto. And we're looking at a *Night in Romania*

JL: A *Nacht in Romania* and it shows you the influence of the Yiddish Theater and how widespread it was in its heyday

EJS: And this is a scream, this poster. Not only does it have photographs of all the actors but it also has the leading actress in a chariot with a whip, ...and the horses are 3 actors with bits in their mouth so to speak, on the leash. It is a very, very funny poster. It's a combination of type of typesetting that's both old fashioned and very new in its day. And it specifies every Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday... If you look at it, it's clear that the audience was basically a *shabbes* audience but the conventions of the Yiddish theater at the time are also that you don't do the things that weren't *shomer shabbes* once you got into the theater.

JL: That's right... Take a look here. Here you have picture; each one is a treasure.

EJS: I see Molly.

JL: Molly Picon

JL: And here you have a poster of Georgy Jessel, the *Jazz Singer*.

EJS: He has the *tallis* on, and he has the brilliantine in his hair and he's looking very respectable except for the young lady who of course had caught his eye. And here you have the father and the *yiddishe mama*. People really know Jolson from this act, but Jessel was really very famous in his day for playing it. It's beautiful.

JL: And here you have *Di Brider Ashkenazi*.

EJS: Ah, So we're back to the Singer brothers, the older one now. We're at the Yiddish Art Theatre that was if not quite across the street from the Deli, was really central to the Deli's location, just a little further down Second Avenue, on 12th Street. *Di Brider Ashkenazi* here that we are looking at does have a Saturday matinee at reduced prices.

JL: And Maurice Schwartz

EJS: who was playing the lead role. And like *Yoshe Kalb*, it was one of their real money winners.

JL: I got to tell you a funny story. Once you see these things, it reminds you. We had groups like Hadassah that used to come into the Deli on Second Avenue and 10th Street. I would always give them a little talk about the Yiddish theater. A woman came over and introduces herself, I don't remember her name, and tells me that she was Alfalfa's girlfriend in the Little Rascals.

EJS: Wow.

JL: She also told me that she was in the Yiddish theater. She once had a role in which she sat on Maurice Schwartz's lap, and he stank. She says to me "You know what: he had bad breath."

EJS: You have some very old ones here.

JL: A *gorten fun leiben*. You can see the age of this poster.

EJS: And it's also at the National Theater.

[JL and EJS start looking at the Molly Picon photos.]

EJS: It's all photographs basically. Jack, look at what you have over here.

It's different photos and posters of Molly Picon. *Oy is dus a leben*,

EJS: You have a photograph here of Molly Picon, who is not very tall, playing the lead character.

JL: I just got a kick out of seeing...

JL: She gave us all of this.

EJS: I saw your brother's correspondence with Molly. It is the most circumspect correspondence between two people that admire and love each other that you could ever possibly want.

JL: Listen, she was on the Tonight Show, one of those shows, and she was on with Helen Hayes. And she went to Helen Hayes and said to her "What's the big deal that you have a theater named after you? I have a room at the Second Avenue Deli named after me."

EJS: Ah! That's bragging rights.

EJS: Your brother wrote to her regularly. After each production, he would send a fan letter, and she would write back. It was actually a lovely correspondence and it was in English.

JL: The interesting part is that English was her first language.

EJS: She was born in America.

JL: Milwaukee, some place like that. [She was born in New York City]

EJS: Her husband sent her off to Europe so that her Yiddish could get polished. After the War, she and her husband did something very, very important. They went to the DP camps, Warsaw, to courtyards where they literally put up sheets since they didn't have proper theaters. And they performed for people right after the War. They gave them something; they were there at the reunion of two sisters that had thought that they lost each other. Molly Picon's memoirs are very rich that way; and so are her husband, Kalich.

JL: ???

EJS: We have Molly Picon here. It's beautiful. She is looking quite young and quite elegant. And then there's one in which she is an ingénue and she is looking quite innocent and coy at the same time. So we see Molly Picon pretty much at all stages of her career; from ingenue to leading lady to acrobat, to comedienne extraordinaire when she got older. And she also became a cross-over into English movies and theater.

JL: I don't have it here. We had it in the other store. We had a poster of Molly with Frank Sinatra in *Come Blow Your Horn*

EJS: That's a good one. Is there anything else you want me to see?

JL: We have a photo of Sam Levinson. He was not in the Yiddish theater. He was involved in Jewish things.

EJS: He was supposed to be a pretty funny guy.

JL: He was a nice guy; I'll tell you an interesting story about him. My brother started doing a lunch for the Jewish blind, the Jewish Braille Institute, to host a lunch. One day they came down, and my brother would hire a comedian and pay him a few hundred bucks to perform. So my brother turned to Sam Levinson and asked "how much do you want to perform." So Sam asked my brother "How much are you charging them for the lunch?" My brother said "Oh, I donate everything." And Sam Levinson goes "So if you have a *mitzvah*, why don't you want so that I have a *mitzvah*?" He refused to take any money.

EJS: That's a *mentsch*.

JL: Here's with Dustin Hoffman.

EJS: Yes.

JL: And here's Sam Levinson hugging my brother at the party.

EJS: Oh that's sweet. And who's this guy?

JL: He is a customer of the Deli, Harvey, who looks great. He looks good. I told him once that the way he looks he can play the Chief Justice, the President,

EJS: A guy in his prime who is really enjoying himself just being at the Deli. Thank you very much Jack.

This interview was transcribed by Elissa Sampson (EJS) and edited by her for length and clarity.

