

**Theresa Ingram**

THERESA INGARM: -- today. How, actually, instead of making you discouraged, they actually give you strength and determination as to what you, you know, this God-given talent that you have. I think I actually have the opportunity to explore it. I think I got a better shot here than I actually would have got in Chicago. So when you say that you're disgusted about things that happened to you in Evanston, you think about the strength that Evanston gave you, and the determination that they gave me. I think I've been very successful. I really do.

Q1: Did your parents talk about life in Evanston to you?

TI: Oh yeah!

Q1: Share things about the history?

TI: Well, you know I'm the last of six. I'm the baby of six kids. And there's 13 years difference between this sister and I. That's 12 and a half, almost 13 years difference. So when I come along, I'm like the little toy in the family, you know? My brother, the last brother I buried was 82. And so, I mean I would hear things in passing but nobody ever just sat down and talked to me about it, you know? They were talking about different things that went

on in Evanston, and all of them were educated. They were all born right here in Evanston. They all went to school here. The older ones, like the three brothers and one sister, they went away to Saint Benedict the Moor's, because their father had died. And so my mom was taking care of these children, and she was helping their home mom with the laundry, because they did laundry up here on the north shore for a lot of the whites. I had a uncle who was a chauffeur, you know.

Q1: What was your uncle's name?

TI: Jesus, I don't know if I remember that old guy's name. Shoot, I don't even remember his name. He lived at 1933 Dodge Avenue. Oh God! Why did you ask me that? Shut it off, I can't remember. (laughter) Oh God! Wanna know what I remember about him? Because I was a little girl, I was really a little girl when he died. And you know they used to put all the coffins in the house. They had the review, and all the coffins would be in the house in the front window. That's what I remember about him. I always, I would go in that house and I would always see this coffin sitting up in the front window with him laying out in the house was cold, I was a little kid then. I don't remember

what his name was. It'll come, it'll come to me after you're gone.

Q1: You said your mother was born in Evanston.

TI: Yeah.

Q1: So, then your grandmother came to Evanston.

TI: Mm-hmm, when she was about, I think 13 or 14 years old. That was my great-grandmother.

Q1: Okay. And why did she come to Evanston?

TI: Well, I guess she was the only one left of her family, and the white family just brought her with them when they moved, when they migrated from the south. They came to Evanston, and it's funny because nobody ever told me their name, you know, what the family was that brought her with them. And there was nobody that came with her so actually she started her family off by marrying a gentleman named Watt. Because I don't even know what her maiden name was.

Q1: You said her first name was Elizabeth?

TI: I think so, I think it was Elizabeth. And the only picture I think, see by me moving so much because [00:05:00] John was my second husband. My first husband was Herbert Seals, and I traveled with him during the service. He was in service. I traveled with him, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, my first-born child was born in Oklahoma, that's

Leslie. And in the process of me not being in Chicago, my mom died. And then they started getting rid of everything, you know. So I really don't have no back-up, I don't, you know. I'm one of those kids that's out.

Now all my brothers and sisters are dead. I have nobody to, I'm the oldest one. There's only three of us left in the big family that we had. Two cousins and me, and they're a year younger than I am so they don't know as much as I do and I don't know that much. It's a shame that your history, it's kind of --

Q1: Lost.

TI: Yeah. It's lost.

Q1: We're finding that out with our family too. I don't know where, my father, for example, he's one of nine children. And we're about to have a reunion this summer, and every -- right now we're (inaudible) family history is trying to remember these things.

TI: Mm-hmm.

Q1: And the interesting twists and turns that our history took is so easily convoluted. So it's very important to start writing down so we can get it as accurate as possible so that it's no longer convoluted but concrete. It's hard.

TI: You know what? My father is an American Indian. I have his birth certificate. That's all I know about him. Nothing else. Okay? I was never able to meet his mother and father, I think he took his sister Harriet, when she was a little girl, he took her to see his parents, and she said the mom was terrible. She was almost scared of her. And didn't have anything to do with the blacks. And unfortunately, my father married a black woman. So I'm a little dark. So I never did get to see her. And my sister is much lighter, she looked more like my dad than I, so. I don't know anything about him either, OK? I'm like a, I just built on a foundation that they cared about me.

My mom used to tell me -- and I'm a terrible dyslexic. I'm serious, I'm a serious dyslexic. She told me, she said, you know -- and because she used to sit down and help me with my homework, and she kept telling me, because this was a God-given talent, she said, and my father was fantastic. Anything he put his hands to he could do. An artist, my sister was a lyric soprano, my brother was a tap dancer, singer, played the piano, my mom played the piano, her sisters played the piano, ask me what piano -- I don't play the piano (laughs)! I couldn't read the first [note?].

She said I (inaudible). You got talent over here! If you just slow down.

Because I was a cute kid, OK, so she figured OK, she told me -- because you know, you fly. So she said "You know, you're a pretty girl, but you know, beauty is only skin deep." And she told me, she said "But ugly is to the bone." She told me, she said "If you pursue a God-give talent and slow down, one day you will make money with your hands." She never lied. And I didn't lose my beauty. I kept that always inside. That beauty is just skin deep, and you never sell your product, you always sell yourself. Because product sells itself. And to keep that in mind, because she was kind of old when she had me. So she was a very wise, very smart woman, very smart.

And I just kind of always kept that back here, and pursuing a dream, and never know where I was going with it. You know, most of the time I'd just let a piece of material out on the floor and [0:10:00] just get to cutting they said "What you doing?" I said "I don't know." You know, but something would come up! And it would always be like one-of-a-kind design pieces.

I was accepted at The Pearl Center. I had about six pieces, one-of-a-kind pieces that I had created. And went to the -- there's a lady on about the 13<sup>th</sup> floor at The Pearl Center. I got to meet her, and she said "These are beautiful." So out of the 26 pieces, she picked 13. But you know what stopped me? "How many colors can you manufacture?" they said. "How many sizes? Who is your cutting house?" "I'm the cutting house." You know, I'm the maker. And this lady that I had met was so interested in taking me to see, I think her name, I'm trying to think what it, Fuller, I think her name was Fuller, at the Pearl Center.

Q1: Was this The Pearl Center in Chicago?

TI: Yes, yes, yeah. Took me down there and --

Q1: I take it as you were growing up, you went to elementary and junior high school in Chicago?

TI: Yes, well you know you do. I went to Catholic -- I went to Saint Anselm in Indiana, then my mother says "I think you need to go away for some strict Catholic training." God! And she sent me to Saint Benedict the Moor's in Milwaukee Wisconsin. I was still in grammar school. I think that they had raised the other kids, and I'm the youngest one and I think I was a little swift for them, because they

were old, you know. And so they said "We'll figure her out." And my mom said "Enjoy my summer." And all of a sudden he says "Come on Theresa, we're gonna take a trip." I didn't know I was going away to Cath-- I was shocked man. I never even missed my clothes out the closet. And they packed me up and sent me to Saint Benedict the Moor's.

Q1: And that was through high school as well?

TI: No I just went -- what happened up there, we were right down the street from the Pabst Blue Ribbon brewery and you would smell this terrible smell about every evening. I guess it was the hops or something that would come out. And I don't -- the first year I didn't have any problems. The second year I began to swell. I mean, I could touch my skin, and I'd get a big knot on it, and then all of a sudden I couldn't walk. My ankles swelled, a lot of pain in my ankles and wrists and stuff. So the end of the second year going into my third year, then I would have graduated from Saint Benedict's, eighth grade, they had to bring me home. So the last half of my last year, my eighth grade, I did at Sexton School in Chicago, on the south side.

And then I attended Inglewood High School for four straight years. Then I decided I wanted to go to the Art Institute. My daddy told me, oh man! He said "Do you think you're gonna make any money making patterns and stuff at the Art Institute?" And you know he always kind of just took his art as just a part of, you know, his being I guess. Never anybody teaching him anything, he'd just do this. He'd build houses up here in Evanston believe it or not. I don't even remember or know what street. I only heard my mom talk about it.

So I wound up trying to go to Wilson Junior College. I hated it. I think I was in there like a semester. And I decided to get a job. So I started working for Lee [Caithorp?] back in 1953, and I was his alteration girl in his cleaners. And then I got married. Then I started traveling. Then I lost my mom, who was my foundation. I'm like "Oh my God." That's what I keep telling this one I got here.

Q1: When you married, who did you marry again?

TI: I married Herbert Bernard Seals.

Q1: Were you married in Chicago?

TI: I married in Chicago.

Q1: And at the time, after your marriage, you were living where?

TI: I lived with my mom [00:15:00] and dad because he went to the service. He went to the service right after Easter. And so I stayed with my mom and dad. But then, trying to go to school, my parents were kind of old-fashioned. Because they feel like when you're married you're not supposed to be running around with single people. "Where are you going? What are you doing?"

Q1: You're not supposed to do that.

TI: No.

Q1: You need to be home cooking.

TI: You need to be home and they were very strict. They were very strict and I was, you know, 20 years old now. I'm sick of it. So I got on the first thing smoking getting up out of here. Unfortunately that wasn't the best move that I could have taken, but oh well, you know. How do you know? I look back at them now and truly appreciate them. Truly, because I guess that without her guidance --

I tell you what I used to do. I have an art ability for décor, so I would -- one day I was sitting, I had curled my hair, and the curling irons had a little tip on them, you

know, the hot iron? And so I had a pair of plastic sunglasses was laying on the table. So I stuck the tip of the curling iron and made a hole in the top of the little plastic, you know right around the rim side. So I said "Wow!" So I had some more rhinestone jewelry, so I went and picked out the stone and put a little glue in there, and by golly it made a beautiful pair of sunglasses. This is, I'm a kid then.

So he would always supply me with anything I wanted when it came to art. Glue and paint, and then everybody started saving their old rhinestone jewelry, because then I started carving shoe heels out, and then -- high-heeled shoes used to be wooden. So then I could grind that out and I would like décor heels on the back of high-heel shoes. And my sisters were crazy, because everything I did they would wear it.

One time I painted a pair of shoes silver. And they used to be my -- well, they never let me out by myself. I always had to have a chaperone. Well, both of the sisters are short. So they looked like little girls, they were married. One of them never got to buy a bottle of beer.

She would come home crying, because they would make her bring a note from her mother. And she had five kids. So they would go with me, and the guys would have a ball with them. Their husbands would let them go with me and my boyfriend.

So I painted these shoes. They looked like Grecian sandals, and they wrapped up the leg. And I made us outfits, and we looked like the Bobbsey Twins. But when we got home we couldn't get the shoes off because our feet started sweating and all these straps were wrapped around. And my sister's legs were kind of hairy. And she caught -- I'm telling you, it was hell getting those shoes off. My dad had to bring us some paint remover because we had silver feet. (laughs) I'm not kidding!

I used to -- they would follow me. My sisters would, anything I wanted to do. I learned how to do hair. I'm a fantastic beautician, never had a lesson, OK? I would do their hair, I made clothes for both of my sisters, you know. And just because I had that, that was a natural-born given talent. And so they let me do whatever I wanted to with them, which was great, you know?

Q1: You had a lot of fun growing up.

TI: Oh, I did, I did. And I really had a lot of fun. She died at 49 years old. And the other sister I talk about -- I had an older sister but she was always working. But the other sister I talk about, she's 84 years old. She's really not my sister, she's my sister-in-law. And everybody thought she was my sister because she's only like four foot nine today, and she wears like a four, four and a half shoe. And she just buried her youngest son. That's the funeral that I had to go to.

But they were just always right there. They were like my companions. Ask me if I ever had a best girlfriend in Chicago, [00:20:00] no. If I ever went anywhere to spend the night with any friend, no. Any friend ever spent the night with me, no. So these two sisters and I were inseparable. You know, even though they were older. And they kept me straight because they knew, especially this sister Harriet, she knew what hardship it was growing up with my father.

And my mother was a very quiet woman, very smart, very quiet. And if he every started raising Cain, she's just go

off someplace. You never heard her argue, there was never an argument at my house. There's never a fight in my house. When he said something that was it buddy, and everybody better jump out the way. It was time for me to leave. The only thing I missed, I missed my mom dying. I missed her.

And the funny part about it, I had just talked to her that morning. Because in the service you never know where you're gonna be. So I had allotment checks coming. So my allotment checks would come to the house and she would just put them in another envelope and forward them right down to me. And that's why she called me the day she died, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. She called me that morning to tell me that she had put my check in the mail. And I asked her, because she sounded terrible, it was hot outside. I mean, you know, seriously hot. And she said she had got a cold. But she wasn't feeling bad, she was just extremely hoarse. And I guess at seven o'clock that night she was gone.

My dad wasn't even there. They had put her in an oxygen for easier breathing, thought maybe she had had pneumonia. You know, had labored breathing and it evidently was too

much for her heart. And by the time he -- she asked for me. So my father went to my mother-in-law's house to get my phone number, because he was gonna tell me to come right home, that mom was asking for me. And by the time he got over there, he got the call. She had left him too, smiling. Smiling, I'm just like "Damn!" And I wasn't even around. But you know. I guess it was meant to be that way.

But I always carry her. I always think she's some -- and then my artistry, when I'm thanking somebody, you know how you walk through the house and you thank somebody for your wisdom? Do you do that too? For the brain power that you have? And the parent that you feel had more to do with it? Well, my father had more to do with my artistry, because my mom couldn't make a button stay on a shirt. And she would sew every Wednesday, faithfully, with her little basket. Two days later, he said -- and he used to call her Mutt -- "Mutt, did you sew that button on the shirt?" (laughs) It was gone again.

So I, with the painting and the décor and that kind of thing, I honor my dad. With the determination of the

artistry, then I honor my mom. With my sisters and all the joy, I honor them. My brothers, with their faith in their God -- because my oldest brother studied to be a priest, and because they wouldn't let him become the kind of priest he wanted to, because they didn't have any black priests in that particular order, they wanted to make him a lay brother. Lay brothers do all the [schlut?] work and can't give out communion. So my brother divorced himself from the church. He went back in his later years, but. You know, and the two of them, they talked about faith all the time, the youngest one and the oldest one. That's where I think the deep faith comes from.

Q1: So, when you came to Evanston, you said in what, '58?

TI: Mm-hmm, in '58.

Q1: What church did you join when you came to Evanston?

[00:25:00] Or did you join a church or did...

TI: No.

Q1: It was just-

TI: Well, I got kicked out of the Catholic church because--

(laughs) I mean, I'd been a Catholic my whole life. I didn't -- and even the guy that I married took Catechism lessons and was baptized, and my brother was his godfather. But we got married during Lent, OK? And in the Catholic

church, nothing like that can happen, because that's a very sad time for the Catholic faith, during the Lenten season.

And then after I got married, I didn't want it to be blessed because I wasn't happy. I thought that if I had it blessed by the priest, then it was solidified, that even if I divorced I'd -- you know, that's how deep that faith was rooted. So I was excommunicated. And coming out of a Catholic religion into Baptist, they're too loud, they're too pushy. I never came out of the church feeling good because they were screaming at me. You know, they scream from the pulpit and it's like you almost go to church to be brow-beaten. And then when you come out, you didn't bring anything with you.

I wasn't bringing anything with me. I guess I like the serenity of my own faith. And so I felt like a fish out of the water. When I married John-

Q1: What year was that?

TI: I think '59? Yeah, his father was Apostolic minister, so they really did shout (laughs) full out. And we're rolling on the floor, scared the hell out of me. And my kids were

jumping up -- I couldn't do that. So, and he used to call me a Jezebel.

My father-in-law and mother-in-law loved me. And I loved them. I loved them. And the one thing I liked about them, they made -- you know how you're a younger person and you go in respecting these people because they are older, and they are John's parents. But I had to gain their respect, because I had to work at it. Work at gaining their respect from them. And I was very successful because they loved me. And I know they loved me. And I got more of an opportunity as an adult to be a friend and a daughter to my mother-in-law than I did being a grown-up to my mom.

So she really kind of stepped in there when I needed a mom, you know. And she would come and spend the night with me, she was great. And I miss her, I miss her a lot. My father-in-law loved me, and he would never let me do anything for him without paying me. He said "Sister, you are losing your blessings when you don't get paid for what you do." And so I would monogram his shirt cuffs and stuff, you know, and he would insist. So I would say "Okay papa." So I would make it cheaper than I would do for everybody else. I even did his chairs in the pulpit. His

church is right there in the middle of Dodge Avenue.

Apostolic church.

Q1: That's where you went to church in Evanston?

TI: Right, on the left side of the street. Apostolic, or Apostolic Faith Church. My father-in-law built that church from the ground. And his little house--

Q1: Do you remember what his name was?

TI: Joseph Ingram. And he said, he'd come to me, he said "Do you think you can upholster two chairs?" So you know, I had dipped around with a little upholstery here and there, but I didn't know he was talking about these big pulpit chairs. (laughs) All these big -- all this wood and stuff! You know, and I'm like "Oh my goodness!" I said yes. But do you know I did an excellent job [00:30:00]?

Q1: Are those chairs still there?

TI: They're still there! And he's been dead for a long time. But those chairs still sit on that pulpit, I'm sure. I hobnailed, I'm telling you, I must have put 99 thousand nails because you know, they had those hobnails then? You know, I reupholstered those two chairs, and then I was telling him "This is for you." He said "No. It's not." He said "You should get paid for what you do, and when you don't you lose your blessings." "I've been losing a lot of

blessings, because most of the time I'd do stuff for people for free." And he said I shouldn't do that. But then other times you can't put a price tag on things that you do.

Q1: I know that feeling.

TI: You know that. Yeah, you kind of look like you'd know that feeling too. Can't, you can't put a price tag on it. You just hope people remember the kindness that you extended to them when you did this.

Q1: When did you start your profession as, with what you're doing with embroidery?

TI: In 19-- well, when I came, when I left my first husband in 1958. I called Lee Caithorp, and he said "Yes, I remember you Theresa." He said "I want you to come to my shop." He says "Come to the store." He says "I've got something I wanna show you, I want to introduce you to." And I says "Okay" you know? And I went to see him. And he introduced me to this monogram machine. Three months it took me to lay down monogram, a monogram that was legible. And for three months, I made a dollar an hour. And they had the nerve to take taxes out of it. (laughs) Oh my God! They took taxes out of a dollar an hour! Do you realize what I

was making, I was trying to take care of me and a baby.

Yes, it was ridiculous.

I had a flair about that machine. I'm an artist somewhere down in my soul, you know, and there was something that was so fascinating about it. Because it was a form of thread in art. So I just kind of stuck with it. But this is not my M-- I am, I wanted to be a costume designer. I mean, I'm far away from what I wanted to be. But this was a nice way to make a living.

So now, I make a living with an opportunity -- he didn't only give me that opportunity. I learned how to make a fur jacket on a sewing machine. I mean, anything I wanted, he was like my godfather, to tell you the God's truth, because he was so cheap he didn't want to pay me. But he was giving me an opportunity. Sometimes you have to accept an opportunity rather than a paycheck. And I think when I left him back in 1960, I was only making like five dollars an hour.

(phone rings) [Hanto?] catch my phone please. Oh, that went on the speaker didn't it? She's not gonna catch it. Forget it! She must have her door shut.

Q1: Yeah, I think so.

TI: That's OK. I'll get it on the caller ID. So he gave me, he told me anything-- you know it's things that I wanted to know about the industry. And "Go back there and see what they're doing." So I learned how to nail skins, to tape them. I've seen how they were cut, I watched mink coats being put together. I helped in the colors, you know. I did his windows at Christmas and his trees. I mean, anything he asked me to do, I was able to rise to that occasion.

Because that again, is a God-given talent. That's what I thought I was working on, you know? Ask me to spell Vincent, forget about it. I can start it off, but I just forget, you know -- I don't know what happened to me. Everybody else in my family seems to be pretty damn smart, and I'm the stupo. But they don't have the kind of talent that I have, [00:35:00] you know? So I said well, I guess I'm blessed with one thing. And you can't be blessed with everything, you know. I get along.

Q1: You mentioned before you had started your own business in...

TI: Mm-hmm, in Evanston.

Q1: When did you start, when was your first business that you started, what year was that?

TI: Let's see, I think I started my first business on Darrow Avenue where Cheek's Dental Clinic, dental office is on Darrow? That was my first shop. It was H&S Monogram. I think it was H&S, yeah, or H&--

Q1: When was that?

TI: On Darrow.

Q1: What year? 19--

TI: That had to be 1961, I think it was '60 or '61. Cheek's Barber Shop was on the corner, and then it was my monogram shop, and then it was the rib crib, The Little Moose. And I think Hanto must have been about, well, it had to be later than that because I think she was either two or three years old. She was born in 1960.

Q1: So it was '63?

TI: It was '63, yeah. And we opened up the monogram to do shirts and other stuff, but we had a cleaners, it was a cleaners.

Q1: There was a cleaner's there?

TI: In the same little, yeah. And then the cleaning didn't go so well. So then they just took the cleaning out and it was just like a little monogram shop. And we sold

beautiful shirts and ties for men, you know, trying to make a little haberdashery. Well, that kind of went along with monogramming, you know. The ties, you could monogram, shirts you could monogram on the cuff. And didn't carry women's apparel. They got too much apparel. Men are like, you know, easier to deal with than women. Women are -- so then, well that wasn't successful, so we closed that one down.

Then I shopped for an SBA [Small Business Administration] loan. And in 19 I think it might have been '67? Gee, I don't know. I opened up a shop on Dempster across the street from Bill's Market. They only gave me 10,000 dollars to -- and then it was put off into separate accounts and you couldn't pay your bills unless you sent the bills to them. And then they would drop the money down into your account to pay the bills. It was awfully difficult getting that SBA loan. I had done real well with that loan. I had put a shop together, unbelievable, on 10,000 dollars.

I owed a thousand dollars to my father-in-law, and I owed 300 dollars to a friend so when the 10,000 dollars come --

you know, they give you x amount of dollars, but then they keep a lot of your money. And so I had to pay that thousand dollars back to my father-in-law. The 300 dollars, because one of my friends, they had helped me make up the rent that month. And but I had a jewelry shop and monogram shop and --

The idea for putting this shop up on Dempster was not so much for myself is that this was a fantastic business for people who were not college potential to be able to run these machines. My idea was to put a monogram factory together. So I purchased five monogram machines. And I wanted to train them. I wanted -- like, if they had a problem like I did, and they were good with their hands, they can take this machine, I can take this machine out of here and make money anywhere I want to go. Anywhere. That's the truth.

And I figured that if [00:40:00] you had that kind of a trade, I mean it's like have machine, will travel. And I've done that too with Jesse Jackson.

Q1: Who were some of your clients?

TI: (chuckles) Well, The Chicago Theatre was a big client. Jesse, it wasn't Jesse Jackson, it was his wife. I sewed for her in 1982 when they were in the presidential campaign. I sewed for The Tribune Tower, the Tribune Building, for all the executives. They gave them robes and I monogrammed all their robes. They had an auction in Chicago for the Civic Opera House, the opera house in Chicago. And they had a fundraiser. So I did Frank Sinatra's towel, and Bill Cosby's towel to be auctioned off by the fundraiser. Oh man, it's been so many.

Q1: Was this the Goodman Theatre?

TI: No, I didn't sew for the Goodman Theatre. I did a lot of things for ministers here in Evanston, for Reverend Little and Reverend Norwood, Reverend Miller. I mean design pieces that, I had to draw the designs, never had a pattern for a robe.

Q2: Did you (inaudible)--

TI: Oh, and that one was [a toy?].

Q2: And it's good too, sorry to interrupt.

TI: Wait a minute, oh yeah. (whispers) I forgot this.

Q2: It is delicious. It's called Miss Elaine's Kickin' Ass--

TI: Wait a minute. You're on tape, (inaudible). I'm sorry.

Q2: I didn't know what happened.

TI: We've got to go past the ice. Are you gonna bring me some too? Are you hot? I'm trying to think of, I had the Bears, I can't remember the Bears. I had, I entertained three of them in my house. One was not a quarterback, he was a black guy. He was funny, you know.

I'm old now, and some of these names are slipping away from me. I know I did Brian Piccolo's wife when I was with Lee Caithorp. I did Barbara Rush's coat when I was with Lee Caithorp. The Chicago Fur Outlet. My artistry has touched people for over 20 years and they have not a clue who does what she does inside any of these coats.

Like I said with Bill Cosby, out of the 19 stars that I met, oh shit, wish I could have met, he was the only one that accepted me to come to his dressing room after the show. And he told me he was gonna take -- "Oh" he says "I'm taking my towels home to my mansion. And I'm gonna take my robe to the studio with me." And he asked me when he saw me, he says "My goodness." He says "You look awfully familiar." He says "Have I ever seen you before?" And he really had, but I was never up on him where I could shake his hand or anything. He was at The Palmer House and

he was up on stage. And I'm a little lady but I found me a little [00:45:00] hole that I could look right up there at him. And from where he stood on stage, he could look right down at me. So I don't know if he remembers that or not, but he said I looked awful familiar. And I said "Yeah, I've seen you before." And when I mentioned The Palmer House, he said "I think it was there that I saw you." You know, so I stood there and talked to him for about five minutes.

But none of the rest of them, you know. The girl that worked with me, Holly, that introduced me, that I was introduced to when I went to The Chicago Theatre, didn't know Holly's last name. She found out that I could sew, that I did design clothing. So she told me, she said "Oh, it'd be wonderful if you would be able to make one of the gowns for one of the female artists that would come on the Chicago stage." Never happened because I think it was Dionne Warwick. And I don't know if they ask her, but Holly said that she already had her designer, so she didn't, you know? What difference would it have made? You ain't gonna wear it, or you didn't have to wear it, you

know. But it wouldn't have give a Chicago person a shot. Didn't happen, you know.

So sometimes I think I missed opportunities. I put on fashion shows at The Orrington, I put on black-tie balls at The Orrington, I put things together for the Women's Club for the black community. I was at a country club up in Palwaukee, or Palwaukee Airport for a fashion show and an evening of entertainment, that they didn't come. And we were 5,000 dollars in the hole for the black-tie ball, heartsick but you know. If you don't try, you won't know. So better off you should try. And I'm still trying. I've gotta go wipe my eyes.

Q1: I can see the way your heart is. You're a hundred percent (inaudible) it hurts when people don't see that you're really exhibiting give. Just like a typical artist, you keep pushing away.

TI: Oh yeah!

Q1: You do.

TI: Oh yeah, I don't care. You know, one thing you cannot let a person or anyone stop you in your dream. I don't think so. I'm not gonna let them do that -- I just did a dress last year, and every time these kids come, they bring their

little drawing. They got the nerve to think they're artists, you know. They can, what do you call them? Fashion illustrators. They get a line or two here or there, you know, "Can you do this?" I'm like, "You can't even pay me to make a pattern." I can take a pattern --

There was a lady right up on Dempster Street named Shirley Mullins, fantastic! I wish I could do all the things that Shirley could do. Shirley is no longer in business either, and ventured out into three stores, OK? But Shirley stepped on into something else. I can't do that. I can't put my dream down to be a nurse's assistant or something? Are you crazy? I can't do this, OK?

Even, I like working with older people and helping them. I'm talking about older people, here I'm 70. But, I mean, I think I can bring something to the table with my energy. I can bring it to them, you know, and make them feel better [00:50:00].

And, but Shirley would make a pattern for you, we're talking about some pieces of paper with some notches and hitches, cost you 150 dollars. They bring me these little

sketches, I'm not charging them anything. I tell them to go, I will go shopping with them, so that they could pick out material that would look elegant and not cost a lot. And then charge them 300 dollars to make this. Then turn it around to get it as close as I can to what their dreams are about. I've been doing that for years. For years. Have I ever made over 300 dollars? No. How many kids? Put it out there in that book, and ask them. How many young ladies have come through Theresa Ingram to look like they look when they went to their proms? I'll tell you, I can't even --

One year, up there on Church Street when I opened up -- that was the last, that was the last store, the one in the Koshgarian Building. And before they tear it down, that last store right there at the fence, that was my store. I put a waterfall in there. I put a painting, Bobby Lattimore, you've heard about him. Fantastic, my honey! I loved him. Not as a male-female thing, but admired him for the artistry. Because the first fashion show I ever did he did my backdrops for me. He just volunteered to do them. And he came and painted a whole mural on that wall, and before they tear that down, that mural is still there. So

when the shop was getting put together, I left all the windows open and it was in the summer, and I wanted all the kids to see Bobby make a little circle here and a little dot there. And a something up there, and bring this picture all together. And at the bottom of the mountain where the waterfall was coming -- I put a waterfall, I put a fountain and a waterfall right at the base.

Q1: What year was that, that you opened at (inaudible) Street?

TI: 1990, I left that store in '93 going bankrupt out of 48,000 dollars. I opened it up in 1991 and I closed it in '93.

Q1: Did you do any monogramming with a store that was on [Trif Street?] just outside Skokie, in that little strip mall?

TI: Yeah.

Q1: It was a monogram place? And--

TI: John Patterson?

Q1: Yeah. And were you trying to develop (inaudible) called tag?

TI: Say that again to me.

Q1: (inaudible). The reason I bring that up, because in '92, oh actually never mind, I wasn't actually over there yet.

TI: T-A-G?

Q1: Yeah, well, in '90 -- I had a business over there in '95 or '96 in a strip mall called Alpha Word.

TI: Right on the straight part of it.

Q1: Yeah, it was--

TI: On the Church Street side?

Q1: Right.

TI: And we, and the monogram shop was at the corner.

Q1: Right on the corner, right.

TI: I'm the tag.

Q1: You're tag? You came into my shop.

TI: I'm the tag.

Q1: You spoke with me then. I developed a logo for you, a tag logo.

TI: Yeah.

Q1: I still have the logo on my computer.

TI: Yes I did!

Q1: You spoke to me. I thought your name was familiar.

TI: I'm the tag!

Q1: I wasn't sure that was you.

TI: You know what I was doing? I had a line of men's sportswear. And the tag that you made for me was a little fold-down tag.

Q1: Mm-hmm.

TI: Fold-down tag, and I told you I wanted to put a condom in it?

Q1: Mm-hmm.

TI: That was me.

Q1: Yeah, and that was me that did the design for you.

TI: Oh my God and I've got the tag! (inaudible).

Q1: I thought it was you.

TI: I caught hell.

Q1: I knew you were very familiar and I was really struggling.

I said, I didn't want to speak out. [00:55:00]

TI: Yeah, I -- well that was Theresa and Griffin. That was the tag. And the thing about it, everybody knew me as Theresa Ingram. Well, what I wanted to do was separate the name, so I went to the maiden initials when I did that. Yeah, oh my God!

Q1: Yeah, small world.

TI: Oh my God!

Q1: I thought that was you, because the family that owned that embroidery place, years after you left, was singing your praises.

TI: You know they did me so terrible.

Q1: I know they did, I know they did. (inaudible) they pretty much used your expertise.

TI: Yeah.

Q1: And because we utilized them to do our monograms for our shirts, we had, we had Alpha Word monogrammed shirts.

TI: Yeah. But you see what happened to him too.

Q1: He moved?

TI: Yeah.

Q1: He lost a lot of clients.

TI: And the thing about it is his mom said (inaudible)-- I mean, you know, I met them when I was still on Church Street. She came in to get something done, but then they got interested in what I was doing and started asking me questions. And I told them that I was getting ready to leave that shop. Had to actually file for bankruptcy, which has haunted me for 10 years. This is the -- this will be the year I'll be coming out of that bankruptcy. And it wasn't the attorney that did this, should have done this on my business, not on my personal, and he did not. You know how hard it is to even rent an apartment?

Q1: (inaudible).

TI: Oh no, not giving you a shot.

Q1: It's crazy, it's really crazy.

TI: And it's nasty as they could possibly be.

Q1: Let me ask you this one question because we're about to run out of tape.

TI: Okay.

Q1: What could you offer the younger generation from your [vast?] experience? What kind of comment or suggestion could you offer?

TI: You know, I'm looking at my grandsons. And I think there is a basic dignity, I mean without that dignity, that kind of a polished, what would you call it? There's humbleness to dignity. You don't have to flaunt it. You have to believe it and walk it. And other people see it within you.

I think I came to Evanston with a different approach, or a different feel. I never wanted to be on the inside of any, because I felt like this was my little piece of the turf and I need to develop it. I think that's what people need to do. I think that's what young people need to do. I think this is maintained within your structure, you know, your own growth. What you believe you can do, and if you have that positive feeling, you can overcome hardships, God knows. (laughs) I mean, I just came out of a basement, you know, six months of living in a basement. Lost homes, lost cars, lost husbands, loss, loss, loss, and here I am. What do you call that? A basic solid determination in yourself.

If you have that self-determination I don't think you need to grab it from the outside. I think you still need to build it from the inside. What do you think?

Q1: I think that's right.

TI: That's what I'm doing. That's what I do, you know. I had some pictures I want you to peek at.

Q1: I will, but we'll get to that.

TI: Oh OK.

Q1: I just want to say, end by saying--

TI: And I'm just bawling, you know I'm not bawling because I'm sad, you know but I've got to get very emotional--

Q1: (inaudible) I get that from you.

TI: Yeah.

Q1: That if you believe [01:00:00] wholeheartedly in what you do, and you want to give so much.

TI: Mm-hmm.

Q1: And (inaudible) I thank you for the fact that I'm able to do this, I'm able to utilize that -- it's like you'd die if you couldn't do this skill.

TI: That's right. You would. And you know I've even said "I'm not sewing another thing." But that's a lie. I'm lying to myself. (laughs) I think that's the biggest lie I've ever told. Tracy you've got to go to confession, no confession

is not right, you need to get in front of the booth and chant a little bit. No, I will never give up. I am never going to give it up. And then I told my kids, I've got to tell you this. I says "When I die I want you to lay me on my stomach and stick a rose between my butt, you know, and everybody to kiss my ass on that one." That's terrible, I know that's awful but. I mean, you know--

Q1: I understand what you're saying.

TI: This is kind of how I feel, OK? And, but I've got some things going now up here in my head. And I know I'm not going to be able to sell them anywhere. I know this. Okay, but I know I've got to do them. I've got to do them. So as soon as the fur industry slows down a little bit the lady out here on Dempster Street said to me, she said "Theresa, put them in the resale shop." So I'm going to put some things together and put them in the resale shop. Because when I tried to get those men's line of clothing out, (whispers) the ministers got after me because of that condom.

Q1: You're not understanding.

TI: They didn't understand where I was coming from.

Q1: That's what I liked when Dolores was trying to teach (inaudible) teen pregnancy. The ministers were so mad.

They finally woke up and said "Oh, I see what she's trying to do." She was up on Dempster at first.

TI: Oh, Reverend Norwood.

Q1: After he learned what was going on he said he got behind her, and after that every year the church donated money to them--

TI: To the Family Focus.

Q1: Because of that. It was just that surface.

TI: Mm-hmm. But then she would turn around and do the same thing to another woman.

Q1: It's interesting how -- and I say this collectively, as a people, we have a tendency to turn our back on ourselves --

TI: Yeah, we do.

Q1: -- and not grasp the full potential of what we have to offer and honor and trust in. That trust has deteriorated so much. I fabricated trust, no, I fabricated this trust.

TI: Yes, I know.

Q1: And so it's really quite hard. But I want to say, I wanna say before this tape runs out too, I wanna thank you for the time you spent with me --

TI: I wanna thank you for even taking out this time.

Q1: -- your story is something that -- I look in the future, one day it could be 50 years from now 100 years from now,

some young inspiring student will hear this tape, go on and change their life.

TI: I hope so. I hope so because like I said, if you've got -- and of course they would get after me. And I just think everybody is endowed, I think everybody that is put here on this earth is endowed with a God-given talent. I don't think there's a person out here, that if they really wanted to do something with their lives, they have the ability to do just that. And I think when you don't use it, maybe--

Q1: We're going to end the tape here in a minute. I just want to end your tape again by stating your name, just state your name.

TI: Theresa A Ingram. Theresa Ingram. (chuckles)

END OF AUDIO FILE