

**EI-1061**

**FREIDA SONIS FEUER**

**BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 1916**

**INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 13, 1999**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82**

**RUNNING TIME: 1:00:40**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY  
STUDIO**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: DANIEL ROSENBLOOM AND  
MELANIE DANIELS**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: EVAN TAPARATA**

**ENGLAND, 1920**

**AGE: 4**

**SHIP: THE OLYMPIC**

**PORT: LONDON**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **ENGLAND: LONDON**
- **THE US: PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA**
- **THE US: NEW YORK, NEW YORK**
- **THE US: LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA**

LEVINE: Today is April 13, 1999 and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Frieda Sonnis Feuer Hafta

FEUER: Feuer (said together simultaneously, laughs).

LEVINE: Feuer (said together simultaneously, laughs). And Mrs. Feuer came from England in 1920 when she was not yet 4 years of age, and

believes she came on The Olympic. But we have also on our, in our oral history collection here at Ellis Island, the interview with Mrs. Feuer's brother, whose name is Harry Sonnis. Okay, and this is for his age at the time of this interview is 82 and this is Janet Levine for The National Park Service. Okay if you would give your birthdate, Mrs. Feuer, for the tape?

FEUER: September 6, 1916.

LEVINE: Okay, and where in England were you born?

FEUER: I was born in London, England, in the east end of London. I even have an address.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

FEUER: I believe it was 102, Hundred and Two, Canon Street Road. I was born, actually, in an air raid shelter, so I've been told, during the blitz in The First World War, and then taken to the hospital. And my registry of birth, which I have, you know, a record of, is London Hospital.

LEVINE: Wow. Will you tell of anything else about your birth?

FEUER: No, I just realized recently, I always thought that my brother and I were both born in London Hospital. But my sister in law, my younger brother's wife, just told us recently -- because she had conversed with my dad many times and he lived to a ripe old age of almost 103 -- and she told me that dad told her that I was actually born in an air raid shelter during, during the blitz, when the big, what they called the "Big Berthas," they were zeppelins that came over and bombed

the Lower East End of London because it was a congested area very close to the Thames, to the river.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, now, you were just not quite four when you came here, do you have any personal memories of life in London in the East End of London?

FEUER: I have just one recollection and that is my older brother and I, and he's two years older than I am, looking out of a first floor window in red flannel nightgowns because we had the measles and there was a myth, or that -- mother made the nightgowns for us to bring out the rash (laughs) -- looking out the window and the children being downstairs and saying, "Get inside, we don't want to catch your measles now!" I think I remember that, or maybe it was told to me, I don't, I really don't know for sure. But that really is the only memory that I have of London.

LEVINE: How about your father and mother's names?

FEUER: My mother was Annie Sonnis and my father was Jacob, but he was called Jack, Jack Sonnis.

LEVINE: And how bout your mother's maiden name?

FEUER: My mother's maiden name was Annie Silverstein.

LEVINE: Now did your family, your mother's side and your father's side, had they been in England for a long time or when did the family settle there?

FEUER: I never met my father's parents because he left Russia at age eighteen and never saw any of his family again except the children in the family who came to the United States and one brother. But my mother's family, the Silversteins, came here when my mother was two years old, and

LEVINE: Came to England

FEUER: Came to, I'm sorry, came to London, England, and we originally left together to come to the United States, but therein lies a tale.

LEVINE: Okay, well –

FEUER: Yeah

LEVINE: -- let me just ask you first, were they coming from Russia, the Silversteins?

FEUER: They were coming from Russia from another part of Russia that my dad came from. My dad came from an area near Bessarabia -- Ukraine, I guess, and I believe my mother's folks came from Latvia.

LEVINE: Oh.

FEUER: Lithuania, Latvia.

LEVINE: Okay.

FEUER: I'm not quite sure.

LEVINE: So you were settled near your mother's parents in London?

FEUER: My mother's parents lived in a very small suburb just towards the end of, at the end of London, which called Tottenham. And I passed it when I, in my travels in later years and got very excited! And it wasn't too far from the city itself and my parents, when they were married -- my mother worked in London, so it had to be a small commute, from home -- but when they were, when mother and dad were married, they lived in London and we used to go on weekends to see my grandparents. And then they were in America with us too, so we were very close to them all of, all of our lives, even my children were close to them. And they lived to a ripe old age so my kids were very fortunate. I think we're all whole people because of our relationships with our grand, grandparents, yeah.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Now, let's see. So, did your mother or father ever say anything to you about what it was like for the Eastern European Jewish community that settled in the East End of London or in and around London?

FEUER: My, my mother, because she was only two years old when she came to London, spoke the Queen's English. Her whole family did, we all spoke English, even my grandparents. I think Jewish was the secret language when, you know, they didn't want us to know what, what they were talking about. And they were very proud of their British accent, and in a way, I think, I know, my mother kind of looked down at Eastern European immigrants because they had a different type of a accent. My dad, my dad spoke about his years in London -- we have in fact an oral history tape of him that was made when he was ninety eight.

LEVINE: Really?!

FEUER: And it's so precious and I, I may, if I can, send a copy of that. It's a cassette.

LEVINE: It's a, it's an audio cassette?

FEUER: Yeah, an audio cassette.

LEVINE: Oh, well –

FEUER: It's wonderful –

LEVINE: -- we would love to copy that.

FEUER: -- because it really, he tells, he was drawn out you know, by a very good questioner, and tells a lot about his late youth and early years of marriage and the early years of the war.

LEVINE: That would be –

FEUER: It's very precious, yeah

LEVINE: -- priceless, yes. So, so your father, so we're talking about, in a way, it sounds as though, at least your mother, kind of distanced herself from the new immigrants coming in from,

FEUER: I think so, and they lived in Tottenham, which was not a Jewish area, but she worked in London for a, for, she always spoke about them for French, a French couple who owned a millenary shop. And she loved red and she said that every morning when she would come into the shop they would say [speaks French], "Ah, la femme en la

blouse rouge!” The girl in the red blouse! And that she saved her money and every other week she brought herself a hat from the shop. She said, “I never contributed to the household like my sisters did. I always wanted fancy hats because I worked on them and I wanted to wear them and enjoy them!” (Laughs) Dad spoke about his life in London. He lived with an aunt in London and learned to become a presser. He talked about his, when he was single, quote unquote, and the fun that he had and the things that he did and we have, you know, quite a few anecdotes of those days, that, very interesting.

LEVINE: Now, who decided that you would come to this country when you did?

FEUER: I think my grandparents decided to come and then, of course, my mother said, “I’m going too! Our family is going too!”

LEVINE: Do you know why your grandparents made the decision?

FEUER: I know that they had one son who lived in America and he probably told them the streets were paved with gold, etc., etc. Anyway, they were, they seemed anxious to come and my mother was the only married child in England, at that time. So it was my grandparents and my two aunts, my, two of my mother’s younger sisters and a younger brother from the Silverstein clan. And my father, and my mother, and there was a little baby girl, she was less than a year old, and my mother was pregnant with brother Harry when they had all decided, I guess it was in 1913, to come over. When we got to the ship, they always examined you. The Silversteins went on, en masse, and they stopped my dad because he had a sty on his eye. And he wanted my mother to go ahead with her family but she said,

“No, I’m staying with you.” Well, that was almost 1914, war was declared, my brother Harry was born, the baby girl died, at probably a year and a half, age one and a half years, I don’t, I think it was pneumonia. And then I was born during the war in 1916 and we never got over. My, the Sonnis family never got over and we landed on July 4, 1920, on Ellis Island. So, you know.

LEVINE: So were you trying to get over? Or there was just no point?

FEUER: There was no point, I don’t think there was any way that we could have gotten over during the war years. And then I guess there was a lot of red tape, you know, and it took time again because the War ended in 1918. But we actually didn’t come over, maybe we had to wait for money. My father had a brother who lived in Pittsburgh and I think that he guaranteed dad a job in Pittsburgh. You had to do that almost and probably they sent us the fare, maybe my uncle from Pittsburgh sent us the fare.

LEVINE: So it was you and your brother Harry, your mother and your father?

FEUER: That’s what I thought

LEVINE: Traveling.

FEUER: And when Harry, when we came here last year and we got on this genealogical kick and Harry started getting documents from the archives, and we realized that I knew that our father was on the dock. I can have, I have that memory of my father and my grandparents being on the dock when we got off the boat, probably at Ellis Island. At Battery Park,

LEVINE: Battery Park

FEUER: But we didn't realize that dad actually came two months before we did and probably established himself and then we came over on the next boat. My mother, and my brother and I. That was a new fact in my life, you know after (laughs) eighty years!

LEVINE: Yeah. So now where did your father go when he came? Where did he settle?

FEUER: He probably, I think he probably went straight to Pittsburgh. You know, he's probably picked up by my mother's family here and took the train or whatever to Pittsburgh and maybe got the apartment for us and worked, you know got a job there.

LEVINE: Now was he working as a presser in this country?

FEUER: Yes, because he had learned, he had trained to be a presser in England, in London, when he came over from Russia.

LEVINE: Okay,

FEUER: I don't think he, his parents in Russia and, you know I always thought they were probably very, very poor peasants. I, what I gather from his tape is that they were not that poor, they had a, a granary. And that they had people working for them! You know, maybe one or two and he said he didn't work in Russia, he studied! You know, "I, I don't know, I studied!"

LEVINE: And he was, did you say seventeen? When he,

FEUER: He was eighteen.

LEVINE: Eighteen when he came –

FEUER: Eighteen. Yeah.

LEVINE: -- to England

FEUER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Interesting. Okay, so, so he came here and was here a few months and then you and your mother and brother came. Do you remember leaving -- well you wouldn't remember that. Do you remember anything about leaving, arriving?

FEUER: Well,

LEVINE: The bow of the ship?

FEUER: As I say, I remember arriving. I remember us at my grandparents' home on Monroe Street, on the Lower East Side. We didn't stay, probably did not stay for more than a week or so and went on to Pittsburgh. I remember very well living there for a year and then I think, according to the tape, my father said things got slow and someone suggested that he would do better if he came to New York. And my mother was very anxious to come to be near her folks, because she'd always lived close to them. And we moved back, and then I can remember every single house that I lived in!

LEVINE: Oh, great! Okay, now how about your grandparents? What were they doing on the Lower East Side? Did you, were they too old to work, or were they working?

FEUER: Well, my grandfather -- I don't remember exactly what he did, but I, I know he had, must have had an industrial accident because he had two fingers missing from one of his hands, and you know how a child is fascinated by something like that. And, a little later on, when we moved to Brooklyn, actually, my grandmother and my mother's youngest brother, Joe, had a pushcart, in Brooklyn though. You know, of food, vegetables. Maybe it was dry, no it was dry goods, I'm sorry, dry goods. So I don't know what, I imagine that my grandfather was still working. My, of course my grandmother never did, she was at home with the family and they worked. The children worked, and they didn't marry when they were eighteen, even the girls, the women, they were maybe twenty five, twenty seven. And the youngest, Joe, didn't get married until he was about fifty.

LEVINE: Oh,

FEUER: So,

LEVINE: And they were helping their,

FEUER: He was the bachelor uncle, yeah. And they did have an older son, who lived in the city, in Manhattan. And, I think, he probably helped them, monet-, you know, monetarily. Yeah.

LEVINE: So now how many years all told do, would you say that the family lived in the Lower East Side?

FEUER: Well, I was four when I came there and they may have lived there for a year and a half or – no, no, they had to have been there four years for the war because we were caught with the -- yeah, they may have lived on the East Side for six years before we came. And then I was just thirteen when we moved to Brooklyn, and I was about five when we actually came to Manhattan to live.

LEVINE: Oh, so

FEUER: So another eight years -- about fourteen years, all told, that the whole family lived on the east side. My grandmother moved to Brooklyn, my aunt moved to Brooklyn, and then my mother moved to Brooklyn. All on the same street. We were very, I think, very fortunate in that respect because we were always a very close knit –

LEVINE: Yeah.

FEUER: -- family.

LEVINE: Well now, you said you remembered the addresses. Can you remember the first place you lived in the Lower East Side?

FEUER: I remember the street, I don't remember the number.

LEVINE: Okay, the street.

FEUER: It was Monroe Street

LEVINE: And this was the street your grandparents lived on?

FEUER: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

FEUER: I'm sorry, they lived on Monroe Street, we lived on Rutgers Place, which was -- I remember we had to walk through a yard to get to this little two room apartment. And we actually, I, I realized many years later, we actually had an outhouse! Not in Oklahoma, but in New York City! We walked into the yard, you know. Later on, we also had a flats, cold flats, no steam heat, you know, cold stone flat. One place, which was 95 Clinton, 195 Clinton Street. Big corner house, the house looked very fancy to us, but the bathroom was a half a flight down.

LEVINE: Now, were these brownstones? Were these tenement buildings?

FEUER: The one on Clinton Street was a, like a three story apartment house. The one on Rutgers Place was probably like a mother-in-law cottage, you know, a lean-to or something. Other places that we lived in on Madison Street, on Norfolk Street, on Montgomery Street, every year I'm telling you.

LEVINE: Now, now I've heard this a lot but why did your family move so much?

FEUER: I know why my mother moved. Because she moved into a newly painted place every year. Now some of my friends say they moved because they got a months free rent -- you know a concession -- but that was not the case. I know mom got new linoleum and a new, freshly painted place. And that was very important to her. She was not, didn't have a fancy house but probably, if she had stayed in one place, they would have had more money, you know! But, but that

was her extravagance. My dad, my dad used to say he'd come home from work, the barrels were packed. We'd come home from school, literally, packed barrels. Okay, go to the next block, 263 Madison Street!

LEVINE: Well now the barrels, did people use barrels a lot for the, the,

FEUER: They used barrels for packing, yeah. You know, there wasn't

LEVINE: What kind of barrels were they?

FEUER: They were large, wooden barrels, you know, with like two slats, two metal slats around them. I mean large ones! And all the household goods and dishes, everything went in there except the pieces of furniture, you know.

LEVINE: Wow.

FEUER: They had to move with the moving van.

LEVINE: Now how, can you describe the, the, the Lower East Side as a little girl growing up at that point?

FEUER: The things that I remember the most are the settlement houses ,which, like the Education Alliance –

LEVINE: Oh, talk about that!

FEUER: the Henry Street settlement, the Madison House. And then there was one on Clinton Street called the White House. And we practically, I practically lived in them when I was not in school. I

used to say, the three, my three favorite things were school, the library, and the Education Alliance! They were wonderful.

LEVINE: Now what did you do at the Education Alliance? What did you do there?

FEUER: Well, they had a roof garden and in the summertime, which was the time that we were off mostly, they, on the roof garden, on the top, I know they had milk and cookies. And I know they had all kinds of games. We played Ping Pong, we played jacks, we, there were, there were physical games, right on the roof. It was, you know, a very large building. We went to camp from there, from the Education Alliance.

LEVINE: Where did you go?

FEUER: We went to New Jersey. I ran home one day, I said, "Mom, for five dollars I can go to camp for two weeks, it's in New Jersey," which was like the end of the world to me -- I'm sure the five dollars was for transportation to get there -- and I said, "If you can't afford it, they said you can go for free." But my mother was very proud, and she said, "You can go, and we'll pay." And it was a wonderful, wonderful experience and as a result I encouraged my two children to go to Y camps and Girl Scout camps and, you know, they all had great experiences. I mean, these were not the private camps, these were the community camps where the values were very good.

LEVINE: Did you by any chance run into Chaim Gross who was teaching art at the Education Alliance?

FEUER: I don't, I don't remember that name. And I don't think that my leaning was towards art.

LEVINE: What were your, what were your leanings as a little girl?

FEUER: At that, at that time, I read a lot. And, I was quiet because we moved so often that I really had very few friends. I mean I was not a, an unfriendly child. Obviously, you can tell I'm a talker! But I, I wasn't you know, always that way. But, but it was mostly reading, a reward -- if my mother wanted to give me a reward it was taking me to the library to get books out, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FEUER: And I liked to acti-, active sports. Learned to swim at camp. Of course, you know, where else would we swim except Coney Island. If you could get through the crowds!

LEVINE: How about the Lower East Side and the social groups? Were your mother and father part of any groups?

FEUER: My mother and father, well, I can't, I can't tell you about my father because I think he had a different personality outside of the home, at his workplace. He came home from work, he put a handkerchief on his head and you know, ate his supper -- greeted us, ate his supper, put a handk-, a wet handkerchief on his head and went to bed. He probably had a headache every night, and hardly spoke to us. He was very kind, but uncommunicative.

LEVINE: What do you think his experience was, I mean as much as you can perceive, have perceived it, his experience in, in the change from coming from the East End of London to Ellis Island?

FEUER: I think he hated the idea of maybe being made fun of because of his accent. Because he had a really delicious accent, he was, it was half Eastern European, half Cockney English and then a little bit of Yankee, you know! And then in the shops, when he worked in the garment industry, a lot of Italian people, a lot of Polish people, most more Italian. And he picked up languages very easily. He really had a very wonderful ear for language and, and would, later on, he became much more open. But in my younger years, I don't, I remember very little communication with him. My mother was the dominant person in the household and a great storyteller. But they both, like every, they closed shop at seven o'clock. I could have friends up in the afternoon and they used to gather round my mother and hear her stories but at, in the evening, no, no company.

LEVINE: No visitors.

FEUER: No company. No neighbors, ever. Ever. She was strictly a –

LEVINE: Because your father would be going to bed?

FEUER: Not just for that. I think that she was very haughty, in a sense. She and her family, her sisters and her parents, and they just didn't bother with people. They spoke, you know, the British tongue and that was it. But dad, I think was probably very sensitive because we, in later years took him to see Hester Street, when the movie came out, and I remember my kid brother and I, in California, we were so thrilled, we said, "Oh pop's gonna love this," because my kid brother was born on Five Hester Street. He hated the picture. And it took us a little while to realize why. He says, "I don't have to see what, what we lived through and people calling us names," and, you know.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like for him maybe the experience, at least initially, was a comedown.

FEUER: I think so. I think he had a really good time in London. He had a good time before he was married. Evidently, he had, you know, a few friends and, and they went around and, and to the, to the pubs and the music halls and he talks about seeing Anna Pavlova and, you know, things like that. In New York my mother would not go anywhere so, but I think his social life was in the shop, I really do. He was once ill, had had a surgery. And a group of people came up from the shop and brought him a gift and they came in, "Jack," you know, "oh, we miss you! We miss--." I said, "Who are they talking about, my father?" You know!

LEVINE: Interesting. Yeah. And how about your mother? You mentioned that she had a certain air about her.

FEUER: Yeah. She –

LEVINE: How did she fair in this change of ?

FEUER: I think she was afraid of, of people, I really do. And just kind of stuck with the family. And maybe that air was a façade to cover a shyness, or whatever. But, but she was a terrific woman. And she had many, many interesting facets to her. But she, we did not have a telephone in the house because she was afraid of newfangled things. We never had a phone in the house, even when my kid brother, who was, had come home from the war and was living at home -- he wasn't married yet. No phone in the house. I mean, this was 1945, -6 -- strange.

LEVINE: What were some of the facets that, that you remember that your mother having and how did they effect you, in any ways, can you think about that?

FEUER: Yeah, well, I was very proud of the way she spoke. And because the teachers, when she would come up for open school -- P.S. 42, New York, I remember that. And she brought my kid brother up, who was a baby then. And the teacher asked her if she could take her to a few rooms so that they could hear her talk! This was on the lower east side where even the children spoke with accents if their parents, you know, spoke only Yiddish at that, at that time. And I was so, so proud of her, you know. Very regal, in the sense. Had a flair for storytelling and my brother brought a tape recorder. I had come into visit from California -- I'll never forget this -- and he said, "Come on mom, speak into the microphone." Well, she shied away immediately because she's afraid of the newfangled things!

LEVINE: How, how long ago was that?

FEUER: This was, well, my kids were, my child was ten and she's fifty-five now, it was like forty-five years ago. But Bill always brought these new things and, and he gave-- she said, "Oh, I can't!" and she, he says, "Speak into the microphone, mom," and she, she proceeds to do a scene from "King Lear!" And both of us, mouths agape, you know, "Mom, what, when, how?" You know, she's, "Oh, I played Cordelia in the eighth grade in London."

LEVINE: (Laughs) Okay!

FEUER: So, that's the kind of thing that always, you know, thrilled me!

LEVINE: Yes, okay, we're going to pause here and turn,

FEUER: I know, I talk too much.

LEVINE: Turn the tape over.

FEUER: Yeah, I'm talking too much.

LEVINE: No, you're wonderful.

END SIDE ONE

BEGIN SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay we were talking about your mother and the kind of shy, and the kind of regal combination that she was. And (clears throat) you said she didn't have friends as, neighbors as friends, except for one.

FEUER: And that was our first friends that I can remember, and that was in 195 Clinton Street. And that family, the Shapiro family, my brother Harry married his wife Sunny. She was, she and her youngest sister, who was, who is about eight months younger than I am and my first friend in America and still, we're still friends -- she's going to be eighty next week, in about a week or two -- my mother and Mrs., and the Shapiro family, my mother and dad and the Shapiro family, were friendly. Which didn't mean that they visited each other much, but, for my mother, she was very friendly! But that's when we met my brother's wife, Sunny.

LEVINE: Sunny, is that

FEUER: Sunny, and Sandy, her younger sister, and knew the Shapiros all of our lives.

LEVINE: Wow.

FEUER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well what was the Lower East Side, I mean, what you think of, at least I think of from the distance of time, is the, is the pushcarts and the sort of, what, just the confusion, the noise, the,

FEUER: The things that I remember most in the physical aspect are the pushcarts on the streets. There were a number of streets that had all the vegetables and fruits and the stores, the, like the pickle store with the wooden barrels. And the herring barrels, where the guy would put his hand in and pull up this icky thing, you know, which tasted so wonderful!

LEVINE: Would you bargain? Would, would people ordinarily bargain, or not?

FEUER: I, I don't think my mother bargained. Yes, people would bargain. Even on a two cent item (laughs), you know, like a tomato or something! I don't think my mother did. She just went and picked out the ones that looked the best and, you know, and would buy whatever, whatever she needed. It was the pushcarts -- people, I guess I took it for granted that they were all there. I loved in the summertime when they would open the fire hydrants and all that water would pour out and our parents allowed us to wear little bathing suits and go and cool off, you know, during the summer. I

remember us being out very late at night in the summer because it was so hot, either sitting on a fire escape or downstairs. There were always people gathered around and, you know, with camaraderie, and -- and most of all I remember, the, the settlement houses. That was such a big part of my life, I, probably from the time I was seven or eight or soon as I was able to go by myself, you know, the two or three blocks to the Education Alliance or one of the others. In fact, when we moved to Brooklyn and I was thirteen at that time we already had a club. And I used to take my new friends from Brooklyn, two of them, who -- there were five of us who remained friends and just three of us are still here -- and I would take them to the Lower East Side on the subway to the club and eventually my sister-in-law, sister-in-law's sister, Sandy, moved, they moved to Brooklyn too.

LEVINE: I see.

FEUER: And so,

LEVINE: So then you didn't visit the clubs anymore in the Lower East Side?

FEUER: No, no.

LEVINE: Well, what did you do there besides, besides a, like games? Was there, were there other things that you did?

FEUER: I can't remember any learning process, if you mean, you know --

LEVINE: Yeah, I wondered about that.

FEUER: -- like lectures, or, I was not into art or anything. I can remember just, like having fun, feeling free, not being in traffic, so to speak, you know, and it was just, it was like pure recreation. In an, in a, in a supervised environment. And most of the time, I had my little brother with me, and he was eight years younger than I was, I was, I was responsible for him but my mother let me take him. And so I was kind of watching, caring for him and just socializing with my friends. Occasionally, we would go on a day, day hike, or, to Central Park or to the Battery, to the aquarium, at that time. Things like that,

LEVINE: Can you remember the aquarium in the,

FEUER: Yes, I,

LEVINE: In the Battery Park?

FEUER: Yes, I can.

LEVINE: Could you describe it, or any experiences that you had there?

FEUER: Well, since then, I have been to such great aquariums, you know, that it seems, I thought it was in the round building in Battery Park –

LEVINE: I think it was, yeah.

FEUER: -- and there were just those windows, you know, that you look through and, I don't know, it wasn't very extensive. But, of course to us, it was amazing. To see that. Of course, when we went to Bronx Park, or –

LEVINE: Bronx Zoo?

FEUER: -- or to the Bronx Zoo, that's where we went mainly when I lived on the East Side. When we moved to Brooklyn it was Prospect Park.

LEVINE: Right.

FEUER: And then it was another whole story with hikes with our friends, groups of friends, you know, to Van Cortlandt Park, to Tibbetts Brook [ph], to the Palisades, and walk to Prospect Park, go to the museum, sit on the floor listen to a, a concert, you know, from where we lived in Brooklyn. Botanical Gardens, lilacs, I mean, wonderful, wonderful, memories, wonderful life.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, were you conscious of being an immigrant when you were a little girl growing and you were in the east side, Lower East Side, were you conscious of having come as an immigrant?

FEUER: No, because of the fact that I spoke English well. My memory, my one mem--, big memory of my very young days, probably when we first , was, being on the steps, on the stoop on Monroe Street, in my grandmother's house and singing a song and having a group of kids around me listening because I spoke with a British, I sang with a British accent. You know, so even then I was "on (laughs)!"

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else before we leave the Lower East Side and go on to Brooklyn, is there anything else? How about your brother? Did you say anything about how he changed? He was six, so by the time he got to the Lower East Side, he was,

FEUER: See, see, at that time, Harry and I were just brother and sister. We weren't friends. Two and a half year difference, and those years was

a big difference. He had his friends -- I mean, we, like, passed in the night. We were there, and maybe he hit me in the arm if he didn't like what I was doing. I mean, he was the big brother. And then when my kid brother was born, eight years younger than myself, and my older brother and I kind of bonded a little because we were sent downstairs. Bill was born in the home, in Five Hester Street and we were sent downstairs and told to wait and then my father looked out the window and said, "It's a boy, run and tell Bobby and Zadie!" And we ran to where they lived on Monroe -- maybe they lived on Henry Street then -- had to tell them and come back and so we kind of, you know, got a little closer together 'cause now we both had a baby brother. You know. But it was only later on, after we moved to Brooklyn, when I was about fourteen, fifteen, that Harry's friends and my friends, all of us became a group. Including my husband because we were childhood sweethearts, you know, had a first, you know.

LEVINE: And how bout chores? Do you remember you and Harry growing up, if you had any particular chores that you were responsible for in the Lower East Side?

FEUER: No. My mother never even trained us to wash a dish or, I mean, we didn't know from nothing. All we knew is we had to listen to mom and pop and if they told us that we had to be home at a certain time - - you know, we never did anything in the house. When we moved to Brooklyn, I remember Harry being the one who would come home from, well, I don't know, he was fifteen when he was in City College -- in knickers! He would take the subway and come back and Friday afternoons at that time, my mother was having knee problems, he would come home every Friday and wash the floors for her. He was,

he was good! Oh, not like me! No, I, I listened to my mother, I did everything she, she asked me to do and uh, but not more!

LEVINE: Can you think of any attitudes that your mother, or your father, tried to instill in you as a child growing up?

FEUER: My mother had such a, I don't know whether it was a respect, or a fear, or a, for anything, any person or any type of authoritative thing. And she was so afraid, I mean, she would never step over the line. If she was told she had to do this, she would never veer from that. She would do it. And I think she instilled a little of that in us. Their values were very good. I mean, you know, they were very honest people. They didn't have ideas of grandeur, or anything like that. It was no snobbery, except for my mother's haughty attitude, you know! But she was not unkind to people, you know, she just, I think she felt a little above them because of that accent. That's all I can, you know, attribute it to.

LEVINE: Well, she,

FEUER: And the fact that she wrote and read, you know, English. My father did too, incidentally. He learned by himself, but you know, they read newspapers, my mother read books.

LEVINE: And also it seems as though your mother dressed rather well, I mean, from having worked in the,

FEUER: Only as a -- from the stories she tells me as a youngster, she became a little roly-poly and she was always clean and neat but not, not, in no high style in any sense -- no jewelry, and mostly housedresses. Since she didn't like going out, because I think she

was afraid of people, my dad used to get very angry at her. He would say, "The society is having something," you know, "No, we're not going." "Oh, she's not going, she's not going!" You know; "She never wants to go anywhere!"

LEVINE: Let me ask you about two things about the Lower East Side and then maybe in Brooklyn as well. Burial societies -- were your family part of a burial society?

FEUER: Yes, yes. Everybody was.

LEVINE: And could you talk about that, just what it was?

FEUER: Well, all I knew is that there was a society that we belonged to and there were burial plots. And it, the society was my father's *landsmann*, people from his town in Russia. And he had two or three friends who he had known in Russia who were in America and I knew them. Those were his friends. Those were the only, his only friends that, who I knew about, you know,

LEVINE: That were outside of shop?

FEUER: Yes. Right. And I knew them by their first, by their last name, because he used to call them, "Greenburg" and "Schwartz," the two brothers, you know (laughs)! And they all belonged to the same society, which was a social society. He would go to a meeting once a month, probably, and we did, they did have an affair once a year and eventually, my mother went to a couple of them, but not every year.

LEVINE: So it, it sounds as though really both your mother and father were, the part in London, the part of their life in London, was really kind of a stopover on route to, to this country. I mean, they left Russia –

FEUER: Yeah.

LEVINE: -- went there, and then continued on later.

FEUER: Yeah. My father did. My mother, I think, felt fully ingrained as a, as a Britisher. Because she was two years old –

LEVINE: Two years old

FEUER: -- she went through the eighth grade, which at that time, was equivalent to going at least through high school, you know, and maybe beyond. And she felt, you know, and she worked there. And she really grew up, grew up there, even though they didn't grow up in the city, per se, you know, in this little outside community. She was, I know from what she's told me, very happy to be working in the environment of, of London, of the city. She, she had a certain amount of sophistication.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FEUER: You know.

LEVINE: And the other thing I wanted to ask you about the pharmacy. Do you remember the pharmacies in your neighborhoods? Either in the Lower East Side or later on in Brooklyn? And what the role of the pharmacist and the pharmacy played in, in your lives?

FEUER: It's very interesting because my, as far as my mother, I don't think we missed a day of school. As far as my mother was concerned, and I guess we were fortunate that none of us were ever really ill, you know, with the type of illness that would require pills or medication or constant going to a doctor. We didn't even know, you know (laughs), what a doctor meant, so the only pharmacy I could think of was the ice cream soda fountain, you know, the soda fountain in a pharmacy. My dad, he used to come home, maybe took an aspirin, I don't know, but he put the wet cloth on his head. And for my mother, we had to be dying, you know, before she would let us stay home from school (laughs)! So I really don't have –

LEVINE: So you didn't have use of it,

FEUER: -- much of a memory. I remember them being on the corner and being kind of an important store, you know, not like the grocery store or something. But,

LEVINE: Do you remember, now were you, was your immediate, nuclear family, were you the first or later in the family to move to Brooklyn? Who went first?

FEUER: We, my grandparents -- no, my aunt Dora, one of my mother's sisters, who was married and had a family, they moved first. Then my grand, grandparents moved almost immediately after that. We were the last to move.

LEVINE: And what was it that, that enticed you? Just to be next, to be close to your family or anything else about Brooklyn?

FEUER: I'm sure with my mother it was to be close to the family. Now, for my grandparents, I can only say that their son, who had been in America for awhile, lived in Brooklyn -- not in the area that we lived in, but close enough and maybe he was the one who encouraged them, you know, to move there. I really don't, I really don't know.

LEVINE: Well, when you moved to Brooklyn, what was that like for you as a, as a change? What --

FEUER: It was a whole new phase of life for me because I went straight into high school. I had been, I had gone to a, a, I guess a junior high, 'cause I was thirteen when I moved, you know, between twelve and thirteen. I was in a rapid class, you know, the RA and RB, and then I would have gone to RC, which was just one year of ninth before going into high school. But when we moved to Brooklyn, rather than go through a graduation with buying a white dress for eighth grade or something, or for ninth grade, my mom said, "Why don't you go right into high school?" They had, high school started ninth grade, ninth and twelfth. So it was, it was like a whole new life for me. I was thrust into high school and I loved school so I wasn't, it didn't frighten me.

LEVINE: So what did you do after high school?

FEUER: Well, that's another story! When -- I really wanted to go to college very badly. My mother made the announcement that the boys go to college and I'd take a commercial course and go to work. And, and so when I graduated from high school, I had had bookkeeping and stenography. And I had enough time, since I loved math, to take, you know, some geometry and algebra, but not enough credits to be matriculated, where I could go to college without paying. And so,

and at that time, I met my husband. I mean, where we really started going together, it was just about the time that I graduated from high school. And he had not, he had left in the, he never graduated from high school because his mother had died and he needed to work, you know. It was a story, it was 1933, which were during the Depression years. I was a little kid, very unsophisticated and they sent me out to two or three jobs, my father, through friends to, for a bookkeeping job. And they always said, "Tell them you're experienced," and when I got up there -- my mother's training -- I could not lie. "Do you have any experience?" "No." So I didn't, I couldn't work so I spent the summer in Rockaway, I got five dollars a month to watch two children. Live in the house, have a summer vacation in Rockaway, ha, ha, making beds, doing things I'd never done before, the woman was so disgusted with me because I didn't know how to change a bed! (Laughing) Yeah. And through that I got an office job, but -- and worked there and then we married and I had a child within a year and a half. And that was the end of it, until later years, when I had never stopped going to school. I still am, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful. Okay, and your husband's name was Jack?

FEUER: Jack

LEVINE: Feuer. And you said that you, you were, you were childhood sweethearts, you had known each other?

FEUER: Well, we, we met each other once a, once a year for two years, you know, like at fourteen and at fifteen, and then at sixteen and a half we really met. We lived in the same area, and

LEVINE: I see. Okay, well, so, well, I'd like to have you reflect back --

FEUER: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: -- but also maybe just, so what happened, you had, you had --

FEUER: We had two children

LEVINE: -- your first child and you had a

FEUER: First child, then during the war we had a daughter.

LEVINE: Why don't you mention your children's names?

FEUER: Stuart is sixty-two, and Bonnie is fifty-five, fifty, fifty-six.

LEVINE: So you stopped working for a period when you had your children,

FEUER: Right.

LEVINE: And then what did you do after, when you had a little more time and

FEUER: After the -- we moved to California, my husband, because he did not have any profession or even a, a real

LEVINE: Trade?

FEUER: Trade. He, for some reason, he had California on his mind and, and I did whatever he wanted to do (Laughs). We went, we left the family and went there, not knowing, we knew, we knew one person who had moved before us, who wasn't even really, you know, that good a

friend. But we were very lucky when we moved here. We were lucky, we met wonderful people. And we had friends, we had friends in California that we met forty years ago. You know, a great, close group. Almost, almost a society, because we all decided, because we had, most of us had imm- migrated from either New York or Chicago, that we had no family plots, and if anyone died it would be up to the close friends to be taking care of things. So we bought plots and started a group, which we still have, we're going full force. Forty years ago.

LEVINE: Do you now, do you meet?

FEUER: We meet, yeah. We meet regularly. I'm an officer! (Laughs) My father -- my father -- my husband was the first president and he was the one who found the, the plots for us and he was the first one buried there. Ironically, we've got loads of them in there now.

LEVINE: Are there any other attributes of that, quote, society besides the burial plots that are like the societies that you remember your father having belonged to back in the Lower East Side?

FEUER: Well, the camaraderie that they had. And I'm sure that they had, like a welfare fund, where they helped each other, which we did at the beginning of our organization. But then, since then, fortunately, nobody needed that kind of help, so we just decided to use that money to have parties and stuff, you know, while we were still, most of us were still here. It wasn't a, it wasn't a great amount, maybe a few thousand dollars.

LEVINE: Right.

FEUER: But, but we have a, you know they're a marvelous group of people. Every one of them could be the President of The United States or the Pope! (Laughs) Or the King of England, you know! (Laughs)

LEVINE: That's nice to hear, yeah.

FEUER: Really. Women and men. Of course, more women left than men, but,

LEVINE: Well thinking back, looking back on your life and, and coming here as just a really, a, little bit of a girl, do you think the immigration experience of yourself and your family had an impact on you, on your personality over the course of, of life?

FEUER: Absolutely.

LEVINE: In what ways would you think it had?

FEUER: Well, I think, you know, having so many different experiences through my life. Coming in contact, because of living in different areas, with so many different ethnic groups, different types of people, it gave me the desire to travel. And I started traveling before a lot, a lot of other people I know did. I mean, I borrowed money and paid it back during the year, you know, but I started going as soon as I was able to and unfortunately it was after my husband died. We kept talking about it and then when he died I said, I'm gonna, and I traveled every year and been, you know, to many, many parts of the world. But my interest is in people, and the sameness and the difference, and different cultures, but the amazing thing is how universal, how alike we all are. And I think that it definitely reflects in my attitude towards peoples, towards peace and you know, being

against wars and feeling that with communication we can, you know, get together and, and live in a peaceful society. In our own way, you know, in our own space. I think the immigrant experience -- that, plus the fact that we had our grandparents for so long and we heard all these stories. And we related, I've related them to my children and I think they're going to have that same feeling.

LEVINE: You mentioned in the very beginning about, you, you felt that having had your grandparents and been close to them made you, you and your family more whole, as human beings. Could you say more about what, what you, you mean by that?

FEUER: I don't know, you know, it's such a, it, it, it, it spilled over because when I came to California, by hook or by crook, I managed to get back to New York every year because I wanted to see my family and friends. As important for me to, to be with my friends, who were long time friends, you know, from way back. I had that feeling, I could never understand, my friends coming and saying, "Well, maybe next year we'll go back," and I said, "Take the children back, let them see their grandparents." And some of them had great grandparents still alive. You know, they didn't seem to have the feeling and I, I felt they were missing out on so much. And, as I would have, I mean, the most precious memories were going across the street to my grandparents home having, sitting down, having a cup of tea, listening to tell, to them tell me stories about my parents, my mother, you know. And it just, it, it flows over into the next generation, and,

LEVINE: Do you think it was something about your particular set of grandparents that make, that lead you to, to the feeling that it, it makes such big, a big difference to have that continuity over time?

FEUER: Well, only partly because my parents were close to them. You know, that I had -- I think that if children and parents are not close to each other, the children's children, will not have that feeling for the grandparents. They may love them, you know, or, because they're grandparents, you know, or for their own parents. I think it's something that really spills over from generation to generation. Not always, of course, but I don't think that my grandparents were unique, in that respect, or that my parents were even. I mean, I look at some of my friends' parents and they were so giving and opened their, their homes to us. I mean, I used to be a little jealous that we could come there in the evening, you know, and, and in my house nobody could come after a certain hour. That part bothered me and I think that I'm completely opposite and have been since I have control over my home, you know.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything you would want to say before we close about coming here, Ellis Island?

FEUER: Oh. I, it was, it was an unexpected thrill! I mean, much more than I had anticipated. Coming here, I mean, it was just like a flood of memories. Now, I, I did have one memory -- I thought I had a memory of being lost on the ship coming over to the U.S. And all my life I kept saying, "Well, I have one memory," I remember running up and down, we were, they were like bunk beds, and calling for my mother. When I came to Ellis Island, and we looked into the room, I think it was the waiting room or the holding room, or quarantine

LEVINE: The dormitory room?

FEUER: The dormitory. I said, "My god, that's my memory!" It's live, it's alive, this is it! And that was what I remembered. And just the whole, the

whole thing was such a thrill, them finding Hester Street, looking at the blown up picture and saying to Harry, "There's the house we lived in!" And then we got a blown up copy of it from the, from the, from Ellis Island and I mean, all these things to me are very precious. And Harry started on, on the research here, on the genealogical, you know, research. And I'm in a creating memoirs class at Long Beach State University and I'm writing memoirs as I remember them. Not in chronological order but just tidbits.

LEVINE: Wonderful, wonderful.

FEUER: Precious tidbits. And now I will have this tape! I mean, I, I'm, I also am an enthusiastic person, you know! Going bananas! That's what's happening! (Laughs) And now to see the family name on the wall. I mean, my imagination runs amuck! And, and I can picture us coming off the boat, meeting the grandparents, and it's just all so exciting! And I love it.

LEVINE: Well, well that's, I think that's a beautiful place to end. I want to thank you so much, a lovely interview.

FEUER: Thank you so much for letting me do this!

LEVINE: I'm speaking with Frieda Feuer who came from England at the age of three and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW