

**EI-1133**

**SEYMORE ZRYB**

**BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 4, 1924**

**INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 3, 2000**

**RUNNING TIME: 48:32**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: HOME OF INTERVIEWEE IN DELRAY BEACH,  
FLORIDA**

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**POLAND, 1935**

**AGE 10**

**PASSAGE ON PULASKI**

**PORT: GDYNIA, POLAND**

**RESIDENCES: SOCHOSIN, POLAND**

**EAST NEW YORK, BROOKLYN**

LEVINE: Today is March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 19...year 2000, and I'm here with Seymore Zryb, who came from Poland in 1934, when he was 10 years of age, on the Pulaski, the ship.

ZRYB: 1935.

LEVINE: Oh, 1935? Here...oh, I see, you left 12/31/34.

ZRYB: We left New Year's Eve. We boarded the ship on New Year's Eve in Gdynia, December 31<sup>st</sup>, and we started sailing January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935.

LEVINE: Okay, so you actually arrived in here...

ZRYB: We came here in January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1935.

LEVINE: Okay. And at the time of this interview, Mr. Zryb is seventy-five years of age, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I want to say that I am here in

Delray Beach, Florida, conducting this interview in Mr. Zryb's home. Okay, if you would say for the tape, please, your birth date and where in Poland you were born.

ZRYB: My birth date is October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1924, and I was born in a little town called Sochosin, S-O-C-H-O-S-I-N, Sochosin, Poland, which was roughly seventy miles northwest of Warsaw.

LEVINE: And did you live in Sochosin up until you left?

ZRYB: (He laughs) Ah, yes, yes. I was born there. We lived there until we left, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, so you left when you were ten. Well, first let me ask you your mother's name and her maiden name.

ZRYB: Yeah, Rebecca. And her maiden name was Schancupp, S-C-H-A-N-C-U-P-P.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's name?

ZRYB: Father's name was Abraham.

LEVINE: Okay, and you had a brother and two sisters?

ZRYB: I had a brother and two sisters, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where did you fall? Were you in...the youngest, the oldest, in the middle?

ZRYB: I was the next to the last (he laughs).

LEVINE: Next to the last. Okay, why don't we say your brothers and sisters (unintelligible).

ZRYB: Yeah, my oldest sister, my oldest sister, God rest her soul, was the oldest, then my brother Harry, also just passed away, was next. Then I came, then my youngest sister, Sonya. Thank God, she's still around.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And that was our family. My mother, that's how we came. We came, my mother and four siblings. My father was in this country for eight years before.

LEVINE: Do you know, by any chance, why your father left when he did to come here?

ZRYB: I have no idea why he left. My youngest sister was three weeks old when he left. Somehow he had a sister living in Brooklyn and she must have talked him into coming here or something. Good thing he did. I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you now (he laughs) if it wasn't.

LEVINE: Right. Do you...did, did, did your father have a trade in Poland?

ZRYB: Yes, he was a tailor.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZRYB: Yeah, he was making uniforms actually for the Polish Army and doing quite well. The reason for his leaving, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay.

ZRYB: Never could figure it out. It was a stroke of lu.. genius, I suppose (he laughs).

LEVINE: (She laughs) With hindsight, right?

ZRYB: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

ZRYB: Only four years there before the onset of Hitler.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay, let's see. So was your family religious in Poland?

ZRYB: Ah, yes.

LEVINE: And did you go to school there?

ZRYB: Yes.

LEVINE: Did you go to Hebrew school? Did (unintelligible)...

ZRYB: There was no Hebrew school. I was in such a small town. We had a teacher that used to teach us the Hebrew and the Talmud and everything else, but I went to Polish school until I graduated public school.

LEVINE: So you were speaking Polish?

ZRYB: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: In the street, we spoke Polish. In the house, we spoke Yiddish.

LEVINE: I see. I see. And when you came here, I assume you continued school.

ZRYB: Yes, I started in the first grade (he laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Can you compare the schools, what...

ZRYB: Wow.

LEVINE: ...school was like in Poland, what school was like when you got to this country?

ZRYB: I really can't, because I don't remember it that well. Here we came here, I didn't really know a word of English and they put me in a class, you know, with other children. And I couldn't speak to them unless I spoke Yiddish to them. And I was well advanced. I was, you know, I had finished public school. Here they put me in the first grade. That didn't last long. I mean, I was only there three weeks and I did pick up the language very quickly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. When you say you finished public school, how many grades did that mean?

ZRYB: Six grades probably...

LEVINE: Six.

ZRYB: ...the same as this country. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh. And how about your...your life in Poland? When you think back on those first ten years...first of all, did you have grandparents? Were they around?

ZRYB: I had a grandmother on my father's side.

LEVINE: And...

ZRYB: All the others were...had passed away before. I never knew them.

LEVINE: Do you remember any...

ZRYB: I remember my grandmother, yes.

LEVINE: ....experiences with your grandmother?

ZRYB: She lived about a half a block away from us. The whole town was probably five blocks, but...(he laughs).

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: It was a small town, a little village actually, on a river, you know.

LEVINE: Were there gentiles in the town?

ZRYB: Not very many in the town, all surrounding us, in the outskirts, the farmers and everybody else.

LEVINE: And what were the relations like between the Jewish people and the Gentiles in and around where you lived?

ZRYB: We really didn't intermingle very much, except on...I remember on Thursdays when they had what they called market day. They'd come out on the...what do you call that area? It's a big open area right across the street from us, and everyone would set up their wares and people would shop. They'd come from all surrounding areas, too.

LEVINE: So were the Jewish people mainly...

ZRYB: Mainly.

LEVINE: ...the sellers?

ZRYB: No, there were Polish people who sold also, you know, whoever had things to sell.

LEVINE: Can you describe anything else about those market days, anything that you...

ZRYB: Well...

LEVINE: ...remember about them?

ZRYB: ...to tell you the truth, I wasn't interested in the market days – my mother was (he laughs). I was interested in running around and playing ball and things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What were the kinds of things you remember doing as a child growing up?

ZRYB: Well, no different than a child growing up here, except we had nothing. We had no radio. We didn't know what a radio was. We didn't see any automobiles at all, just a bus that came through once or twice a week on the way to Warsaw. And we, I don't know, we just played games. In the nice weather, we took off our shoes and ran around barefoot, the young people. We spent a lot of time by the water. It's a beautiful river, you know, and the banks were very nice. And we made it our lifestyle, I guess. What the older people did, I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZRYB: There was no industry to speak of. I had a relative who was a barber. As far as I can remember, the rest of the stores were all owned by Gentiles, and when I say Gentiles, I mean Polish. The church was directly across the street from us, and was a magnificent structure. People were starving, but the church was beautiful (he laughs).

LEVINE: Was there a temple at all?

ZRYB: Nah, we had a little shule, a wooden shule. And I don't think we had more than a hundred and fifty families altogether in the whole town and most of them were probably my relatives (he laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ZRYB: And there's perhaps one or two that remained alive throughout the Holocaust.

LEVINE: Was your father's family and/or your mother's family from that area in Poland (unintelligible)?

ZRYB: Yeah, my father's family was. My father's family was from that town. My mother's family came from a town about fifteen miles away, which was called Ciechanow.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

ZRYB: C-I-E-C-H-A-N-O-W, I think it was. In Polish, I think it would be pronounced Ciechanow.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so...so actually their parents and maybe their parents before them were all coming from...

ZRYB: Right.

LEVINE: ...a relatively...

ZRYB: Right.

LEVINE: ...close area. Uh-huh. And let's see. (Pause) How about your grandmother? Do you remember her?

ZRYB: I remember her. She died in 1938. We were in this country, of course, and of natural causes. She probably was in her middle to late eighties.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZRYB: But I do remember her. Well, we lived right near each other, you know, and even though my father wasn't around, she was my grandmother, you know. We visited her very often and...

LEVINE: What was she like? Like how...what...how would she be with you?

ZRYB: Well, she was just an old woman.

LEVINE: Uh.

ZRYB: Looked to be an old woman.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ZRYB: It's hard to describe. I think all the people at her age (he laughs) at that time were old women. If they were sixty, they looked old. My mother looked old when she was thirty-five, I think.

LEVINE: And what about...you were really...you were about two years old when your father left.

ZRYB: I was three years old, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, so you really, you really...

ZRYB: I didn't know him at all.

LEVINE: ...didn't know him.

ZRYB: I didn't know him at all.

LEVINE: And how did your mother get along when he was...

ZRYB: Well, my father supplied us with money.

LEVINE: Oh, he sent money.

ZRYB: Sure, he sent money all the time. We had a lot to eat. We didn't want from anything really. He supported us. He supported my mother's sister even, and maybe his own sister and brother. But the...

LEVINE: Was he a tailor in this country....

ZRYB: He was...

LEVINE: ...as well?

ZRYB: Yeah, yeah. He came here. He started working right away as a tailor and then he opened up his own shop, you know. Tough going. It was tough for him, too, then. He was away from his family.

LEVINE: Yeah. Where was he? Where was he living?

ZRYB: He was living in Brooklyn with his sister.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: Yeah, and she kept an eye on him. It's true. He was a tall, good-looking man and, you know, many women looked his way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And she kept him in the, you know...

LEVINE: Well, that was a real issue with a lot of the men who came first...

ZRYB: Oh, it happened so often.

LEVINE: ...and the wives were back in the old country.

ZRYB: My mother, I'm sure, cried her eyes out, not knowing what's going to be. It took eight years before we were able to come here.

LEVINE: Do you know why it was that you came when you did – you and your mother and your siblings?

ZRYB: Well, we would have come earlier, but I have...my brother was a cripple.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZRYB: See, and the American government wouldn't issue a visa, wouldn't take someone in who couldn't support himself. It took a lot of hard work and a lot of money that my father couldn't afford at the time to try to convince the government that he would not be a ward, you know. People pledged their houses and so forth to make sure. And then it...what finally took...would have taken about three, four years took eight years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so...

ZRYB: And then when we came here...

LEVINE: Well, do you remember leaving? Do you remember leaving?

ZRYB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What was the departure like?

ZRYB: Oh, it was sad, very sad. Even as a youngster, I remember I had to go say goodbye to the teacher of our school and told her I was leaving to America. She said, "Will you write to me?" This I remember (he laughs). I said, "Sure." Never did.

LEVINE: Did you know other people who had left?

ZRYB: No. No. I did...we did meet our next door neighbor, who had left...or did leave about a year later. And she had a son in Mexico City and she went to Mexico to live in Mexico City. And she came to visit us in the great reunion (he laughs) years later.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. So do you remember anything your mother took with her?

ZRYB: Well, she took her bedding, dishes, whatever she had, whatever she was able to take.

LEVINE: And how did you get from your little town to the port?

ZRYB: Well, we...I remember taking a train to Warsaw. We went into a town called Plonsk, P-L-O-N-S-K, which is the town where Ben Gurion was born, so he was a neighbor about seven miles away. And we took the train there to Warsaw. We stayed there two or three days, I don't really remember, until all the papers were officially signed or whatever. And then we took a train to Gdynia, which was the port. Today it's called Gdansk. It's...yeah, and we got there December 31<sup>st</sup>. We boarded that day.

LEVINE: Had you had examinations, physical examinations?

ZRYB: Yes, I'm sure we did. I don't remember it, though.

LEVINE: And you...your brother who was crippled was one of the people traveling with you?

ZRYB: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so you got onto the Pulask...Pulaski?

ZRYB: Pulaski.

LEVINE: Pulaski. I just realized that's the name of the Pulaski Skyway, right?

ZRYB: That's right, named after a General, I guess he was, yeah, General Pulaski.

LEVINE: Right. And what was that voyage like?

ZRYB: Well, it was a rough one. It was three weeks and the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean are very, very rough.

LEVINE: And what was the ship like and the accommodations that you had?

ZRYB: Well, we were, we were in the third class, I guess you would call it. And I guess the whole ship was probably Jewish (he laughs), at least in the third class was. They had a second class and a first class, whom we didn't see. We had our own dining room, which was a very large dining room. And I remember...the only that I do remember about it. First, we were sick as dogs in our cabin. As soon as the ship started to move, all of us were throwing up and were sick. We couldn't eat. Took a few days before we got our sea legs and then it was very nice. I mean, I remember a Friday night, it was all religious - services and the women lighting candles and everything. It was...and that's what it was until we got here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And during the trip, there was a frightening time when they thought the ship was gonna go down because of the weather, but nothing happened.

LEVINE: So you were in cabins? Were you in a cabin...

ZRYB: Cabin, yes.

LEVINE: ...with your family?

ZRYB: Yes.

LEVINE: ...alone with your family?

ZRYB: Yes, we were.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ZRYB: Not only were we alone, but we had a young lady with us, a girl about my age, perhaps a year older, came by herself. This is a very interesting story. Her mother put her on a ship and she says, said to my mother, "You've got four children. Make believe you have five. Will you take care of her?" My mother couldn't say no to anything, and sure enough, she stayed with us. As soon as we left, we never heard from her again (he laughs).

LEVINE: So you were with her through the journey, and when you got to Ellis Island...

ZRYB: Ellis Island.

LEVINE: ...did somebody meet her, is that what happened?

ZRYB: Yes, she had an uncle in Boston or something and...never said, "Thank you" or anything like that, just left and forgot about us.

LEVINE: And you never heard from her?

ZRYB: Never heard from her.

LEVINE: Wow.

ZRYB: Of course, we came in and....

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

ZRYB: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

ZRYB: Well, very exciting. I mean, we saw the Statue of Liberty and all that. For a ten-year old from the old country, big buildings where you saw anyway, the skyline, looked beautiful. And then my mother pointed out the man, "This is your father." You know, in Yiddish. So? (He laughs) I didn't know him, you know. My sister, God rest her soul, she knew him. She remembered him. Of course, she was sixteen when we came here, so...

LEVINE: Can you remember your first impression when seeing your father, what you thought?

ZRYB: No, I just saw a man – he was a tall and heavy-set man, you know. He was a very nice-looking man, little mustache and...(he laughs). Told me he was my father, so he was my father. I started to love him, I guess (he laughs).

LEVINE: (She laughs)

ZRYB: He took us off, the three of us, and we went, I guess by car. I don't remember. Someone must have had a car and we went to East New York.

LEVINE: Now what...what...how long were you at Ellis Island?

ZRYB: One day.

LEVINE: And how about your brother?

ZRYB: My mother and brother were there nine and a half weeks.

LEVINE: Could you talk whatever...

ZRYB: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...you know about that?

ZRYB: Nine and a half weeks and my sister used to go with someone, 'cause she didn't know her way, every single day, twice a day to visit. We, on the other hand, we were put in school, my youngest sister and myself, and we Americanized right away, you know. We forgot about everything.

LEVINE: Did...

ZRYB: Not that we forgot about our mother, but they wouldn't let us go, and there she was alone. My brother was put into the hospital area and they kept him there and there were times they thought they would send him back.

LEVINE: Your mother must have been frantic.

ZRYB: It was a difficult time.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZRYB: Difficult time. How she kept her sanity, I don't know, but she did.

LEVINE: Do you know what they were doing those nine and a half weeks?

ZRYB: No, no. My mother had poor vision, even at that time, and she was illiterate as far as reading goes, you know, and writing. She could read the Hebrew book a little bit, but that's the ways of Poland or other European countries where women never learned. And what...how she kept busy the whole day, I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: But I guess she sat and spoke to people. There were others like her.

LEVINE: Do you think they were...it was a physical thing, or were they seeing if money could be posted so that your brother wouldn't be a charge or...

ZRYB: Well, that's where the problem was. It was a physical thing with him. They knew that he wouldn't be able to make a living on his own. Today he could definitely make a living, because he was a...had a terrific mind. It was just his body; he couldn't walk. There was money...not money, but there were pledges by people from our shule and friends of my father's who pledged their houses. That's a marvelous thing to do, for a period of, I think, ten years. That means that for ten years, they couldn't sell their house even if they wanted to. They pledged it as collateral in case something happened and they had to support my brother.

LEVINE: You mean more than one house?

ZRYB: Yeah, a few people did that.

LEVINE: Wow.

ZRYB: Well, a house...what was a house worth in those days, especially in East New York? Might have been three, four thousand dollars or something. And, of course, we had lots of people who...

LEVINE: I'm going to close this because I can hear the telephone call.

ZRYB: Oh, she's talking?

LEVINE: Yeah.

(Sound of door closing)

ZRYB: And finally there were the...I don't know who it is, the State Department or the Immigration Department, was finally convinced that he will not be a ward of the state. My father took out policies obviously on his life and so forth, and as the years went by, there was no...there wouldn't have been a problem. I mean, I grew up and my oldest sister was old enough to make a living, you know, so always be someone to support him. And that's the way it was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now you said "East New York," so did your father then....after, when you left Ellis Island, did you go to Brooklyn...

ZRYB: Brooklyn.

LEVINE: ... or did you go to east...? Okay.

ZRYB: Well, East New York is part of Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh, oh, okay.

ZRYB: Yeah, it's a section of Brooklyn.

LEVINE: I didn't realize that.

ZRYB: And I lived with my father and my two sisters with my aunt in the third...

third floor or fifth floor walkup? I forget. My aunt, her husband, and a cousin of mine, a girl. But my sister shared the room with her cous...with her first cousin. And I and my younger sister shared a room with my father. I slept on one side of him and my sister slept on the other side of him (he laughs). And that was for nine and a half weeks until my mother was cleared to come home. And then when...my father got an apartment in the area and life went on.

LEVINE: What was it like for you those first days and weeks? I mean, first when your mother wasn't there,...

ZRYB: Strange.

LEVINE: ...your father you didn't know.

ZRYB: Strange. Well, well, that's right, but I did have my sisters, you know, so I wasn't alone and I acclimated pretty quickly.

LEVINE: Could you describe yourself as a ten-year-old coming to this country?

ZRYB: I really don't.

LEVINE: What kind of a little boy were you?

ZRYB: I really can't. I really can't.

LEVINE: Temperament, personality. Well, how...were you shy? Were you...?

ZRYB: I was shy, somewhat shy, yeah. But not...typical ten-year-old. I wanted to learn, you know, and quickly I learned. And I just became a baseball fan right away, too (he laughs).

LEVINE: Was baseball something you knew about...?

ZRYB: No, no. We didn't have baseball. We didn't know anything. All we had was what they called football. It's soccer really. And that's a European sport. We didn't have anything. I mean, growing up without what kids in this country had...radio and automobiles, some of them who could afford it. We didn't have that.

LEVINE: Do you remember those first days and weeks and months, things that struck you as new and different, anything that stands out that, you know, was so different to you from anything...

ZRYB: Not really. The only thing that I can remember is that, of course, we had to start getting used to living the American way of life and start speaking English, which we did.

LEVINE: Do you remember how...what it was that helped you to learn English?

ZRYB: No, just as a youngster, I guess, it's easy to learn. Went to school and everyone was speaking English, and I had...I spoke to them in Yiddish whenever I had to. And there were some young people there who were Jewish who understood Yiddish. And before you know it, probably a couple of weeks went by, and I was speaking English (he laughs).

LEVINE: Was your father a good English speaker when you got here?

ZRYB: No, no. Not at all. No, he spoke very...he spoke English, but very poorly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: My mother would...no, I don't think she ever learned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: I mean, she understood, but she had trouble making sentences, so it took my wife some time (he laughs) to get used to her.

LEVINE: Now this section you were living in, East New York, was it a large Jewish community there?

ZRYB: Basically it was Jewish-Italian area...

LEVINE: A lot of immigrants?

ZRYB: ...intermingled, yes. East New York was basically a Jewish area with Italians; they were probably fifty/fifty, perhaps sixty/forty. And we got along fine.

LEVINE: Do you remember being called a “greenhorn?” Do you...

ZRYB: Oh, sure, for a long time. Jokes were made (he laughs). “Take your other foot off the boat,” you know, things like that (he laughs).

LEVINE: Did...were there any values or attitudes that your mother and father tried to instill in you that you can remember? Maybe...

ZRYB: Well...

LEVINE: ...sayings they had that they....

ZRYB: My mother, not. But my father, I know one thing, he was a very hard worker and he was an honest man. And that’s what he tried to instill in me is if you’re working for someone, give it your best. If you’re underpaid, complain, but don’t shirk your job.

Don't shirk your duties. Give a hundred percent. And it was a way of life. I always maintained that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were there any...can you...if you think about your mother and father, did they have any sayings, you know, things that they would repeat to you? You know what I mean? Like little...

ZRYB: Things that I don't remember really, but I'm sure there were some idiomatic expressions.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. Right.

ZRYB: I don't recall off-hand which ones, but...

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZRYB: ...every so often, I do hear something. Oh, my mother said that or my father said that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZRYB: Actually, my mother's influence was more than my father's, because my growing-up years were in Europe, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: When I came here, I was almost a teenager, you know, so your understanding is a lot different. But I quickly threw off the old ways, whatever old ways I had, and became an American citizen, you know, through and through.

LEVINE: Did...did your mother and father want you to become Americanized, do you think?

ZRYB: I would imagine so, sure.

LEVINE: Yeah. But they themselves, did they hold...were there traditions, though...

ZRYB: They couldn't.

LEVINE: ...that they held?

ZRYB: They couldn't. They were...well, there was no schooling. They didn't have any schooling and the type of life we had at the time, it was hard work. My mother had to take care of a house and, you know, and four children. My father worked around the clock sometimes, you know, so a good thing that he was religious; otherwise he would have worked seven days a week. So the only rest that he had was on the Sabbath. And my mother was, you know, cooking and cleaning and whatever.

LEVINE: And what was like...life like for your brother who was crippled?

ZRYB: Well, I'm sure it was very difficult, because he was in a wheelchair like all day long. And I remember the times my father tried to help him by having operations performed on him, you know, to see whether he'd be able to walk. Didn't help. I guess it was polio. I don't...

LEVINE: Did he go to school?

ZRYB: He had a teacher that came in, the tutor that came in, I don't remember three times a week or whatever. And he learned. He had a very sharp mind.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

(Sounds of sirens in the background)

**END OF SIDE A**

**BEGIN SIDE B**

(Sounds of sirens in the background)

ZRYB: He was able to do with his hands and it was terrific.

LEVINE: Huh. Did your mother and father ever become citizens?

ZRYB: My father was a citizen, sure. My mother...

LEVINE: Was he a citizen when you came?

ZRYB: My mother never was...became a citizen because she was illiterate. My sister had to become a citizen on her own. She was beyond sixteen when she came here, but myself and my brother and my youngest sister were automatic citizens on my father's papers. If that wouldn't have been enough, I was in the Army, so I would have been a citizen anyway, so...

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you actually came during the Depression.

ZRYB: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So...

ZRYB: Things were very tough.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZRYB: Very tough.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything particular that you were doing?

ZRYB: Oh, I remember my father having a...he had a factory and he had forty people working for him.

LEVINE: Wow.

ZRYB: And he couldn't make a living. Very, very difficult times. But he managed to...borrowed from Paul to pay Peter and so forth. Every week he made...if he didn't make it, he would borrow a few dollars and pay it back the following week. And we struggled...

LEVINE: Did your father...

ZRYB: ...but we never wanted from anything. We had everything we needed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your father...was he able to maintain these forty people working for him during that time?

ZRYB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

ZRYB: They made a living; he didn't. He was a contractor and I guess he wasn't paid enough to have any money left over after he paid his workers.

LEVINE: So when you say he was a contractor, what does that mean exactly?

ZRYB: He...he was like the middleman. He would get material from a jobber and he would make up coats from that material. All the workers were unionized and they got x amount of dollars, and I guess he wasn't too much of a businessman to figure out how much he had to be paid for a garment, so it was tough.

LEVINE: So in other words, somebody or some company would...would commission him to...

ZRYB: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: ...make x amount of coats.

ZRYB: Manufacturer would give him...send him material and say, "Make a coat for it...for us," you know, and the sizes or whatever it is. Actually he made large-size women's clothes, large size coats and suits. That I remember.

LEVINE: Hm.

ZRYB: I used to help out in the summertime.

LEVINE: Yeah, where were you when....

ZRYB: It was a hot factory, oof.

LEVINE: What was that like, in the hot...in the factory?

ZRYB: It wasn't (he laughs)...it wasn't good.

LEVINE: Yeah. Was the factory in East New York?

ZRYB: It was around the corner from us, yes, about three blocks away on Blake Avenue.

LEVINE: So...so tell about your first jobs while you were...you were still in school, I take it, when you first started, or no?

ZRYB: Oh, I didn't work. I, no, I did help out in the summertime when there was no school. I would help out.

LEVINE: What would you do?

ZRYB: Well, I'd make out labels, you know, and hang them on the coats, the sizes and so forth, various things whatever it was. I'd even sweep the floor if I had to. My sister was working in there, up there, too. She was a seamstress or something. She worked on a machine.

LEVINE: And then how long did you stay in school before you actually got a full-time job?

ZRYB: Oh, until after high school. That didn't last very long because I had one summer and then I was in the Army (he laughs).

LEVINE: You were recruited? You were...

ZRYB: Yeah.

LEVINE: Or...

ZRYB: Yeah, I was drafted.

LEVINE: You were drafted at that time.

ZRYB: I was in the...I was deferred for a half a year. I was...when I was eighteen, I was drafted and I wasn't finished high school, so they deferred me until I did finish. The moment I finished, "Uncle Sam wants you." (He laughs)

LEVINE: And where did you go?

ZRYB: Camp Upton, which was on Long Island. From there, we went to Birming...Alabama, Fort McClellan, about fifteen miles north of Birmingham.

LEVINE: So it must have been an experience for you to see all these different people from all over the country coming together in the Army.

ZRYB: And how!

LEVINE: What was that like?

ZRYB: Well, like everyone else, we were thrown together with all kinds of people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What kind of experience did you have in the Army?

ZRYB: Not too much. I was very fortunate where I was sent to, to Panama for three years. Not my choice, but I wasn't in any danger.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ZRYB: I volunteered for European theater, knowing what was going on there, but they don't pay attention to volunteers.

LEVINE: Hm. So you really wanted to go? You wanted to go there?

ZRYB: I did. Well, I was a nineteen-year-old. You know, you're gung-ho, you want to do something, but the Army has plans. They do what they want.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when you got out of the Army, then what?

ZRYB: Well, I was unemployed for a few months. The Army paid me twenty dollars a week, you know, what they'd call Fifty-two/Twenty Club.

LEVINE: Fifty-two/Twenty.

ZRYB: (He laughs) And we had some friends who were in the same boat, and then one by one, they got jobs. So I was left alone and I said, "No, no, can't do that." I had no one to talk to, so I got a job. I figured it was going to be a temporary job. I an...I answered an ad for an office work and it was 1946, April, I think. I figured I'd work until the summer and take the summer off. It lasted until 1987 (he laughs).

LEVINE: (She laughs). Did...well, did you go home to live with your mother and father...

ZRYB: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: ...afterwards?

ZRYB: Sure.

LEVINE: So...and where was your job?

ZRYB: In Manhattan.

LEVINE: Manhattan.

ZRYB: Sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so what was the company?

ZRYB: Forty-Seventh Street. 15 West Forty-Seventh. Company was Medo, M-E-D-O Photo Supply. They were a supplier of photographic material to studios and graphic arts people. Nice organization.

LEVINE: So what did you start out doing and what happened in your career there?

ZRYB: Started working on a bookkeeping machine, the old bookkeeping machine. They were very diffi...and gradually worked myself up to running the office and that was my job.

LEVINE: Hm. And when did you meet your wife?

ZRYB: Met my wife in 19..., January, 1951.

LEVINE: And how did you meet?

ZRYB: Well, it was a bli...it was a blind date arranged by my sister's husband (he laughs), who knew her from her workplace or whatever it was. He was a salesman. She worked for the either UJA or (unintelligible), one of those places. And he said, "I have a nice girl for you." (He laughs) I lived in Brooklyn, she lived in the Bronx, but I had a car, so it was no problem.

LEVINE: So did you like her right off?

ZRYB: Yeah.

LEVINE: (She laughs)

ZRYB: I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what...

ZRYB: Didn't take long.

LEVINE: Did you get married soon or...

ZRYB: Well, we got married that year.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: I met her in January. In April, I proposed. In November, we got married.

LEVINE: Wow.

ZRYB: Not too bad.

LEVINE: Yeah. What is your wife's name and her maiden name?

ZRYB: Shirley and her maiden name is Cohen.

LEVINE: And do you...you have children?

ZRYB: I have three children, yes.

LEVINE: And their names?

ZRYB: I have two sons and a daughter. My oldest son, his name is Howard and he lives in Merrick, New York. He has, married to Linda, has two sons, Matthew and Jesse. One is eighteen, going to be eighteen, and one is going to be fifteen. And my

daughter Laurie lives in Old Bridge, New Jersey, which is not far from where we live. And she married to Mark. They have two daughters, was Melissa and Jamie. Melissa is going to be sixteen in a few weeks...yeah, couple weeks. And the younger one is eleven, going to be twelve. And I have a son who is retarded, who lives up in New Hope Community in Loch Sheldrake, and he's thirty-nine years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And he's been there since 1987. Before that he lived with us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And he goes to work. You know, they...sheltered workshop and it's a good deal for him there. And we're happy that he's there.

LEVINE: Is that in New Jersey?

ZRYB: No, it's in New York.

LEVINE: New York, uh-huh.

ZRYB: Loch Sheldrake, New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: It's a wonderful place for him to be. Matter of fact, he was just down here at the end of January.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ZRYB: We have somebody taking him down to us, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, well, how's...how is your life now that you're retired and your children are grown?

ZRYB: Well, it's quiet. I miss my kids, of course, but you can't be here and still have them. So we see them...when I'm up there, we see them often. And down here, we see them once in a while, either come down or we go up. And we live a retired life, play a little golf. My wife is busy playing cards quite a bit. I have a card game here and there. I'm not crazy about cards. I don't mind playing, but I really don't like it too much. I think it's a waste of time. And whatever we do...

LEVINE: And I...

ZRYB: I'm busy with my synagogue also. I go to services every day, sometimes twice a day.

LEVINE: Well, has that been true all through your life?

ZRYB: No, it has not. We were orthodox all the time until the war years, you know, and then when I came back, I sort of strayed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: And it took me until 1964 to get back to being religious, when my father died. And I started to go to shule to say Kaddish for him and I started liking it again. And I decided to continue being orthodox, which I have until this day.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. When you look back on coming to this country as a ten-year-old and the whole immigration experience, how do you think that experience affected you as a...your personality, your character? Do you think...

ZRYB: Oh, definitely. The fact that I was European-born had a lot to do with my character.

LEVINE: In what way?

ZRYB: I had a different outlook. I was very...very proud to be an American. The moral upbringing in Europe was a lot, in our case anyway, was a lot stricter than it is in this country. Oh, my thinking has always been half American, half European, so to speak.

LEVINE: How, how, how, how...what, like what's American...

ZRYB: I don't know.

LEVINE: ...and what's...

ZRYB: There are certain ideals that Europeans have – respect for elders and so forth, that the American kids never really learned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: Same way, today's age especially there is no such thing. We revered the elders. Today they revere youth.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: It's a different philosophy. Why...you know, you grow up differently when European-born. You're happy that you're in this country, away from all the anti-Semitism or most of the anti-Semitism (he laughs).

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZRYB: In Europe, we had it tough. I mean, Polish people didn't let you live.

LEVINE: Hm.

ZRYB: Those years. Maybe today it's a little different. I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah. And also, how about the changes you've seen since...over your lifetime? Could you say anything about what's changed that you've seen...

ZRYB: Well...

LEVINE: ...that's significant to you?

ZRYB: Not really. It's just the evolution of things. I mean, you're now in the material world, where you were not many years ago. You had nothing and you were happy. Today you may have a lot and you're not really happy. Most people I know are quite wealthy. I mean, we're not wealthy, but we do okay. Still as wealthy as they are, they're not happy. They're missing something. Either their children didn't grow up the way they wanted them to and.... I'm fortunate. My kids are very good. They didn't follow in my footsteps - they're not religious - but that's their choice. But they have good lives (pause) and that's all I ask for.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. When you look back on your life, what would you say are some of your greatest, were your greatest satisfactions?

ZRYB: Well, obviously getting married and having children and then having grandchildren. That's the greatest joy, a couple of Bar Mitzvahs and a Bas Mitzvah already, and looking forward to the last one, which will be in a year and a half away. (Clears throat)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, well, is there anything else that maybe we haven't touched on that you can think of relevant to your coming here, starting a new life...?

ZRYB: Not that I can think of. One thing I can say – I'm glad I'm here (he laughs). With what went on in Europe, as you know, there are people that say it never happened, right? Yeah, what happened to my family? Where are they? Uncles, aunts, cousins, not one left alive.

LEVINE: Okay, well maybe we'll stop here. I want to thank you very much.

ZRYB: My pleasure.

LEVINE: Very interesting interview. I'm speaking with Seymore Zryb, who came in 1935, beginning of 1935 at ten years of age from Poland. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

END OF SIDE B