EI-1156
WILLIAM GANICK
BIRTHDATE: MAY 28, 1918
INTERVIEW DATE: JUNE 30, 2000
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:39
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

AGE:

SHIP:
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is June 30th, the year 2000, and I'm here in the Ellis Island studio with William Ganick who ca—who did not come through Ellis Island and is actually—this is a—a bit of a unusual interview in the sense that Mr. Ganick will be speaking about his—well, his mother and father came through after they were first married. They came from Russia. But the main story is really related to his father, Gershem [PH] Ganick and the—and the experience of Gershem Ganick and his two brothers and the name change that occurred, we think, at Ellis Island. Okay. So this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Well, let's start. If you would just say your birth date—yeah, your birth date.

GANICK: I was born in East Boston, Massachusetts in May 18th—May 28th, 1918.

LEVINE: Okay. And your—your father and mother—well, do—did you know your father's birth date? No, okay. All right. Well, we—we're not sure and—and—and if you do get that information, we'll plug it back into the—

GANICK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —file that we'll be having on you because you're the interviewee. And—and so we may have more information about Mr. Ganick's father and mother, especially when the American Family History Center opens and—and the ship's manifest; are there. That would be very interesting. Otherwise, through the archives. Okay. So why don't you tell the story that's come down in the family about what happened with your father when he immigrated and was processed?

GANICK: My father was discharged from the Russian Army in 1892. I own his—I have his discharge papers. And I'm going over to—when I get back to Boston, going over to the Harvard Department of Russia—Russian Education and see if I can find someone who can read 'em for me. He came in 1892, he and two brothers. And they were—all three of 'em were, I think, married when they came. And they landed in, I always assumed, Ellis Island. But they could have landed in—in Boston because they were coming to Boston to be—to be in East Boston where a number of people from their village were living. They came over. They left a little village, a shtetl, in southern Russia called Shepatovka.

LEVINE: And spell—

GANICK: S-H-E-P-A-T-O-V-K-A. And they illegally crossed into Poland. It was illegal for Jewish people to leave this section of Russia called the Pail [PH]. And from there, they worked their way and walked their way up to Hamburg, Germany and took a boat. And that's the reason—I wonder if—there must be some records as to whether boats from Hamburg, Germany came to Boston or whether they came to New York, Ellis Island. When they get to—when they arrived in America, neither of them could speak any English and had never seen the English words, the English language in anything.

LEVINE: The English alphabet [unclear].

GANICK: The English alphabet. Coming from a very, very small shtetl, when they got to—to America they got separated into three different lines in going through Immigration, which I think was right off the ship. And when my father's turn came in the line the Immigration officer asked him, "What is your name?" My father said his name was Gershem Ganick. And I think the A was sort of a hard A. It probably was G-A-R-N-I-C-K. And they wrote down on a piece of paper, Ganick, G-A-N-I-C-K. First time my father and mother had ever seen their name in English. And they held onto that little piece of white paper as if it were the most precious thing in the world, because this was their—this was their license to—their—to come to America. The other two brothers got in two different lines and said the same thing, "What is your name?" "Ganick." And they were

written—their name was written down as G-A-N-A-K. A third brother said the same thing and his name was written down as G-A-N-E-K. There was Ganick, Ganak and Ganek. [chuckles] And they held onto their little pieces of white paper. I know—I was the youngest in the family of six children and I remember being—when very young, saying to my father, "Why didn't you men ever get the names all straightened out?" And he said, "When we got that little piece of white paper that was the most precious thing" they—something they dreamed about all their life and dr—walked through most of Europe to Hamburg, Germany and saw their name for the first time in English. They weren't going to rock the boat. [coughs] And they—my mother and father—my father said they were going to walk two blocks up from the Boston—Boston harbor or—and settle there. They had enough with boats. They literally lived right on the—the wharfs in East Boston. The one brother went to a town called Belmont [PH].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: Which is near Cambridge in Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: And the third brother—the Belmont ones all became lawyers, the—the second and third generation. And the third brother went to Brockton, which was a big shoe community and got into the shoe business. But they never saw any reason to—to change their name and, because the—

LEVINE: And to make them the same [unclear]—

GANICK: Because—yeah, because that piece of white paper was official and had their name, the first time they'd seen it in English. And the only story that I remember, one of the brothers wanted to go inland, go to Chicago or go someplace in America, didn't want to be near the—be near the water. And he was a—very much of an extrovert. He was the one who went to—who was G-A-N-A-K. And when they got off the boat there were pushcarts. And they saw things they had never seen in their—Russia. And one was a pushcart with bananas. And bananas were unheard of. So the br—the one brother, Gan—G-A-N-A-K, who was a slight wild man and an extrovert, ran over and bought a banana, bought three of 'em, brought 'em back so each brother could have a banana. And they began to try to eat them without peeling 'em. And they all agreed that in America you do what Americans do. "They're peculiar and we'll have to get accustomed to eating bananas." [laughter] And you know the—the—the—the fibers in banana, it's impossible, I would imagine. Oh, with strong teeth, you could probably get a bite or at least the soft stuff came out. But that was their—that was their experience. My mother and

father, who stayed in East Boston two blocks from the—from the dock, my father was a brass pourer in Russia and worked for—worked for a—someone where they poured brass candlesticks—

LEVINE: Oh.

GANICK: —and brass—mostly candlesticks. He—my mother, who was—who was very short—my father was very qu—was very quiet man. He was—he had a heart problem all his life, as I can remember. And—but my mother was five foot, four, of pure, utter dynamite.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

GANICK: She was pure electricity. She was active and she heard about auctions, sales that they had on the docks of things that were not—heard this from other people in Shepatovka, who lived around East Boston. These were things that were shipped to America that were never picked up. And the—I imagine the immigration or trade division of the government would put 'em up for sale. And she was told about this and it was right on the wharf that was only two blocks from where they lived. They went down there and there was a tremendous wooden box. And all they would say on the box was what the person who'd shipped it had indicated in the form. And this box said "Textiles."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: So my mother and father bought the box and they then got a pushcart and brought the box up and rented a store in—two blocks from the docks. And my father—they opened the box and the box was full of all kinds of fabrics. I imagine there might have been the nice woolens, the nice cottons from—from England or parts of—other parts of Europe. My father took the box and made a table and they set out the textiles. And my mother obviously knew how to sew. Everyone did. And she got hold of one and she brought it over, small, little hand sewing machine. And she set up a business of making things out of—out of the fabrics. My mother was [chuckles] a—a specialist on things that, what I would call today, muumuus, big sacks that fit anyone, one size, a hole cut for the head, two holes for the hands and just length. And—

LEVINE: Did you say she brought a small sewing machine with her, you think?

GANICK: I don't—I—well, she got hold of one.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GANICK: I—I don't think they would have lugged it all the way from—

LEVINE: Right.

GANICK: And they needed a sewing machine. And they started a business. My—I was married about 58 years ago and my wife died about five years ago. And when we first got married we lived with my in-laws outside of Boston, because we—my wife was earning $24 a week. And I went to work as an ar—artist. I went to art school as an art director and I was earning 20. So we decided when I—I couldn't marry her until I earned at least as much as her or more. [chuckles] So when I got up to about 28 we got married. And I—I worked in a downtown section of Boston that was near the—the leather and textile industry. And one day, it dawned on me that when we moved out of my mother-in-law's and got our own apartment, we were going to need linens. And I remember my mother, from this little store, became a dry goods store, sold cotton and fabrics and corsets—I remember corsets—and blankets and—and she used to buy them from a—from a wholesaler in the cotton district of Boston called Farley Harvey [PH]. And I—that used to be near my office. I used to see them down the side street. So one day, I decided to [clears throat]—knowing that someday we were going to need towels and sheets and pillow cases, I decided to call on Farley Harvey, walked in the door. And there was someone my age and I said, "Are there any of the original people who started Farley Harvey here?" And the man said, "My father's in the back, Mr. Farley, and he was the one who started it. And go talk to him." [unclear] so I went back and met this man, very, very nice man. And I told him a story about my mother and father—my mother, because my mother was the dynamo and—who built the business. And he said—he said he thought [unclear], "Oh! I remember. That little wild Russian." [laughter] He said, "She wouldn't take no for an answer. She had no credit and we ended up by giving her things on credit." And he—he—he—"We just couldn't—she wouldn't accept no." He said, "And she was so shot out of a gun." And he said, "She became one of our good customers," and, "Oh, I remember her!" He said, "She was—she was a dynamo." [chuckles] So, yes.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father have—was your father the—I mean, was he religious? Was he kind of the—reading the Torah while your mother was—

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: —out doing the practical things of life? Is that—

GANICK: Well, well, my father developed a heart problem. And I think he might have had it—I don't know. He—he might have had it in Russia. But he developed angina.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: And my mother took over and we lived in the back of a store. My mother ran the store and my mother had a—a two-burner gas range. It sat on top of a wooden stove. And because there were six of us, my mother was an authority of one-pot meals, always with beans and potatoes and carrots, some meat, because we were kosher and would not eat milk products or meat products. And we were just a family. The only time we sat down as a family was the Sabbath, Friday night. That was unbreakable, Friday night and Saturday. On the Sabbath the store closed. And otherwise, my m—the store was open all the time. If anybody rang the bell, my mother [chuckles] would let me get out of bed, put on a bathrobe because there was a customer, and she could maybe sell something.

LEVINE: So did you live behind the store?

GANICK: Behind—behind the store.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: There was a—behind the store and it was a three-decker tenement house and the second floor. And we had no central heat. We had a—we had a coal stove. We had—we had a bathroom out in the corridor. We went to the local gymnasium to bathe.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: Not very often. In the summer, we took natural baths in the Boston harbor and my mother had long black hair. And the gymnasium had bath nights where people came, women's nights and men's nights. And I remember as a kid—as a child, my mother would go every time it was a woman's night. And she'd come home in the wintertime. As I said, my mother—I don't think I ever saw my mother walk. She trotted.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: She was always going. And she'd come home and from her hair there'd be icicles because she hadn't fully dried her hair, because for one cent in the bathhouse you got a linen—piece of linen from Ireland [chuckles] that was the size of a handkerchief that was absolutely nonabsorbent. It was so shiny. [chuckles] And—and you would—you would—she would come home and I always was—I always was amazed that—and she'd never get sick. And she was—I was the youngest and the—my mother had three girls in a row and three boys in a row. So my youngest sister, who

died about a month ago, a month and a half ago at 92, sort of brought me up, the youngest brother.

LEVINE: Oh, she was the oldest sister [unclear].

GANICK: No, the youngest sister.

LEVINE: Oh, the youngest of the three girls.

GANICK: Yeah, the oldest sister brought up my oldest brother, who's still alive. And—but—

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: My memories of my mother and father were fabulous. They were wonderful. I was the—I developed rheumatic fever and going through a City of Boston school department physical exam, which I was amazed they did in Boston in those days, they discovered I had a bad heart. So I was the sickly one. So I was inundated, between my sister and my mother, who was my pal, my buddy, my friend, my—[chuckles] my supporter. She was—she was absolutely marvelous. And—

LEVINE: What other—would—can you talk about any other ways that she kept from Russia, from the Old Country that—after she was here?

GANICK: Well, not that I'm aware of. She—she still cooked—we ran a kosher house. [chuckles] There was a—on the third floor of our three-decker there was an Italian family, the Cardinellis [PH]. And there was one Cardinelli my age. And every—every Fr—Saturday morning I used to go up and get this young boy. And he'd come down and [chuckles] my mother would give him a nickel to turn on the gas range. And I used to be infuriated when—I couldn't have—rarely got [chuckles]—nickel was a lot of money. And I never—and he got a nickel. And I would say to my mother, "If the Bible was right but today, you know, you're—they'd have to chop down trees to make a fire and you just turn the switch." And—and—but my mother insisted—insisted on that for an awful long time. And then when I got a little older, when we—we got a little older and she began to realize—but I remember calling Don Cardinelli and giving him a nickel [laughter] for turning on—for turning on the gas range.

LEVINE: Yeah.

GANICK: Lighting a match and turning on the gas range. And it was [chuckles]—and, no, the—the only thing my—when my mother and father talked Russian we knew there was a secret going on. And we were—we--they—

LEVINE: So they were fluent in Russia as well as Yiddish? Did they speak Yiddish too?

GANICK: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, Yiddish was the—

LEVINE: What—

GANICK: The universal language.

LEVINE: They would use that with each other in the house?

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you know it? Did your—

GANICK: I knew Yiddish.

LEVINE: —brothers and sisters know it?

GANICK: Yeah. I knew some—I knew—I knew the important words, food and [chuckles] eating and—

LEVINE: Speaking of food, you mentioned before we started the tape recorder what your mother brought for the passage on the ship that could be eaten during the voyage.

GANICK: Well, I have no proof but I've been—I've heard people say what she brought were things that, from the time they left Russia, I would guess, and got to Hamburg, Germany, which might have been a couple of months, and coming over in steerage might have been a month. When they got to Germany they loaded up with dried fish, bread, pumpernickel bread, which, as it got old, you still could eat it. Dried fish, pumpernickel bread and beans and potatoes and carrots and beets and cabbage. I mean root vegetables that would keep without refrigeration. And in the—in steerage, they had a—a series of stoves that went all the time and there was hot water all the time. And—

LEVINE: You mean other people were cooking—

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: —in steerage?

GANICK: It was—it was—it was—anybody could bring a pan—now, I—[chuckles] I was not there.

LEVINE: Right.

GANICK: But this is what I picked up. Anybody could bring a pan and, of course, they all needed hot water for tea. I guess it was the universal drink. There was no such thing as dried milk powder or milk on board. They were allowed above deck twice a day to see the ocean and—and there was hot water so they could, with dried fish and dried beans. And they didn't know—from where they came from, oranges were not known. With the exception of apples and pears, I think, they didn't know any other fruits. They didn't know grapes. They didn't know—but I live with a—with a group of people who are—I live with enough other wealthy people and they—they always ask me—I'd had a number of heart operations. And being 82 years old, "You have wonderful health. You must have been brought up fabulous with a lot of milk and a lot of orange juice." My first glass [chuckles] of orange juice was when I was 17 years old. [laughs]

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause. [tape off/on] Okay. We're continuing here. Can you remember your mother talking about her immigration experience? Her—talking about the things you're telling me. I mean, did she speak of them much?

GANICK: No.

LEVINE: No.

GANICK: No. She spoke about—she spoke about things in Shepatovka. Shepatovka was the middle of a tremendous sugar beet area. And there was a man who owned the whole shebang, who was called a baron [PH]. And there was a Cossack post on this baron's property. It was tremendous. And my mother used to say that on—on weekends, but not as bad—on many of the Christian holidays they could hear the Cossacks getting drunk. And my mother would—my great grandmother would tell my mother and her sisters to get out of the house and go hide in the woods in the snow. And my mother always use—used to—said a couple of times they didn't know if they were more scared of the wolves that they heard in the snow [chuckles] than the Cossacks. But the Cossacks came down to the village and raped and plundered and—when they were drunk. So they would be told to get out. In the summer there was no problem but in the wintertime they'd get out and they—

LEVINE: Right.

GANICK: —hide in the snow.

LEVINE: How about anti-Semitism here? Did your mother or father experience that, or did you children?

GANICK: No. We lived—we lived in the section of East Boston that was all Jewish. My mother and father had very little—my mother and father—really, my mother was the driving force—took over a—and bought a number of three-decker houses that my mother would go to the bank. And she'd come back and I'd hear some—in Yiddish, she'd tell my father, "We have another house," because the bank would plead with her. "Mrs. Ganick, would you take us"—during the Depression, the banks didn't know how to handle real estate. "Would you take over? You don't have to pay any taxes, don't have to pay any mortgage—have to pay taxes but no mortgage payments. It's yours. You run it and you keep the money." And my father always disapproved of these because it was his job to paint them and make little repairs in the—in the property. But every time she went to the bank she came back [chuckles] literally with another building.

LEVINE: So in other words, during the Depression the banks were—had foreclosed on these houses?

GANICK: Foreclosed.

LEVINE: And then she would what? She would buy them?

GANICK: No, no. Take 'em over.

LEVINE: They would give them—

GANICK: They would give them to her.

LEVINE: But—but she paid taxes but—but she would get the houses—

GANICK: She had to pay tax—she would pay taxes to the city of Boston eventually, as little as she possibly could. And the city of Boston wasn't going to take over the property. They didn't want them. And she—we had—I remember the most expensive tenement we had, the—was $8 a month. Most of them were $4 a month rent.

LEVINE: You mean where you were living?

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GANICK: And these were buildings—we owned two buildings to the right of us and one building to the left of us. And other buildings, she took for a while and—and there's one story about my mother. I was [chuckles] very, very young. And we rented the—the Jewish people were beginning to leave East Boston. And the—our tenants were mostly Irish fishermen because the boats—the wharf was right there. And in those days, they would go out—stay out till they got a—filled the boat. And there was no communications and they—the men would be out sometimes for months. And the—and I remember, as a kid, we'd be having dinner and I'd hear a little knock on the door in back of the store. And my mother would go and I'd hear my mother carrying on a conversation, whispering to someone about someone wanted to borrow some money. My mother would come, go under the mattress, take out some money and give it to the—the wives of these fishermen because they had nowhere to—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

GANICK: My mother was very, very, very bright. My sis—

LEVINE: Do you think she made a profit? Do you—

GANICK: No.

LEVINE: Was it—no. She was—

GANICK: No. Oh, no.

LEVINE: She was—just let them h—have—

GANICK: It was just—and my mother was very, very bright. My sister always said my mother could have been a Bloomingdale's if she knew how to speak English. [chuckles] Our little groc—our little dry goods store. And my mother read the notices. She—the bank told her to—how to read the notices of when ships were coming in. And I remember a number of times my mother would tell me to come with me while a ship was coming in, a fishing boat. And we'd go down to the docks, not very far. And my mother was chubby. She wasn't fat but she was solid. She was—she was chubby and she would get dressed with her—with her fancy clothes, clothes she wore to go to—go to a shul, a temple on the holidays. And she had [chuckles] a—wore a fox piece of fur with the mouth of a fox. [chuckles] She'd put that on and she'd go to the boat and stand on the gangplank. And these men would come off and I'd be in back of my mother. And these men—first of all, the gangplank is like that. These men were giants.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

GANICK: And my mother was standing there and say, “Joe, give me your money.” And she wouldn’t budge till she—he gave her her money. And then my mother would peel off some money for him, because from the docks to where we lived there probably was seven saloons. And she knew if she didn’t the money would be gone and—

LEVINE: These—these were the men who were married to the women—

GANICK: The—the—the—yeah.

LEVINE: —who she had given—

GANICK: And—and my mother would stand there and she wouldn’t budge. And they’d say, “Mrs. Ganick, I’ve been at sea for three months.” [chuckles] And so and so—and my mother would peel off something for them to have a—a—have a drunk. And then she’d go back and sit down with the women and give the women the balance of the money after withdraw—taking out what—what—what they owed her. But—and the women were absolutely—thought she was the greatest thing in the world, because they never could—the husbands would arrive with almost no money in their pocket, because they spent it all in—a—and they’d take a day and a half to come home after living in the saloons with all their buddies and talking. So that was the—and as a kid, I was—I was frightened. These men were—[chuckles] and my mother just said, “Joe, give me your money.” And they’d plead with her and she wouldn’t budge. “Give me your money. Give me your money.” [chuckles] And then they reluctantly would take it out. My mother would count it, take off a certain number of bills, give it them and say, “Joe, go have a good time,” and then would wait for a couple of others. And she’d go back to—and I was so impressed with my mother, that she could take on these—

LEVINE: Oh. W—could you say anything else about East Boston when you were a—really a little boy? It was—it was Irish and it was—

GANICK: It—

LEVINE: —Jewish, you’re saying.

GANICK: It—it was—it was Jewish and Irish and then the Jewish people, as they—as they accumulated money, moved into Dorchester.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: Not Newton. They moved into Dorchester, which had a big Jewish community and a big Jewish temple. And then the Italians moved in.

LEVINE: To Dorchester or East Boston?

GANICK: East Boston.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: And the Irish left. The fishing industry stopped. The wharfs—because the fishing industry went around where Atlantic Avenue and Gloucester—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: And [clears throat] the boats out of East Boston were very small boats. [clears throat] And we stayed there until we were the last of the Jewish people in the—my mother—my father died and my mother died. And then after my mother died, we moved to—I moved in with my younger sister, who brought me up in Roxbury.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: And just one last story. My mother died. She left an estate of $1,200 or $1,100 and there were six of us. And my oldest brother, who was a—went to Harvard and was a mathematician and was the bright one in the family, we all got together and I—I was there. And they agreed that the money would go to Winnie [PH], my youngest sister so she could get a bigger apartment in Roxbury and buy a bedroom set for my brother and my middle brother, my brother and Irving, two of us. My older brother was married and we were the only ones who were living at home. My older bro—my middle brother went to night school and became a lawyer. And we moved into—she got an apartment in—in Roxbury and we—she went out and bought some—bought a bedroom set. And my brother and I thought that we were absolutely in heaven. We were sleeping in a bedroom set where everything matched, the beds, the dresser, because we slept in a wooden—nothing matched in our house ever. And we were—and here we had a dresser and a two—[unclear] mahogany veneer beds. [unclear] didn't spend much money and we thought this was the closest we came to heaven and being rich, like rich people. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow.

GANICK: And—

LEVINE: Could you say anything more about East Boston? Like, were there social clubs? And how did the Irish and the—and the Jewish people get along? And did they have their own societies or—

GANICK: Yeah, we—we—we had nothing—nothing to do with them. I went to school with some of my friends who were Jewish. We had problems with the Italians.

LEVINE: What kind of problems?

GANICK: In that during the Easter and Christmas and the hol—the Catholic holidays they would push us off the sidewalks. And they used to keep saying to us, "You killed our Lord." And as a kid, I couldn't understand it. I couldn't ask my parents. They were—they were not—

LEVINE: Why couldn't you ask them? What—what—

GANICK: Well, we never discussed religion.

LEVINE: Oh, you didn't?

GANICK: No, we were—we were Jewish.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GANICK: And we went to a little shul down the street every Friday night and every Saturday and every holiday. And we had a little rabbi who came in and taught—and taught us how to get bar mitzvahed. And we—we would not have anything to do with the Catholics because they were the ones who persecuted them in—in Russia. At least, they were non-Jews.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

GANICK: And—and—and they used to say, "You killed my Lord." And as a kid, I couldn't understand. You can't kill God. You—God is for—God is forever. I mean, what do you mean, we—I didn't do it. [chuckles] Kill their Lord. And this used to tr—and—and they were—they were not—there were no—there were no fights because we stayed separate. The only thing I remember is that they'd push us off the streets, the sidewalks.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: They'd be hanging around a corner. We'd come along and they'd—we couldn't walk through them. We had to get on the side—out on the road and walk around them. And these were the young Italians, not the old ones. But we had no—we had no reason to experience anti-Semitism

because we stayed—and I don't know if you have run across this before. We only knew the people in our block.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GANICK: Not [unclear]. No. We—if there was a Jewish person there we knew them. We'd—but you never socialized with the other block. I mean, it was just little blocks and—and—

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: —we—we—we knew everybody on our block, across the street and—and we knew them intimately, almost like family.

LEVINE: Would you go into each other's houses?

GANICK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And went to school together, went to—went to the synagogue every Friday and Saturday with them and—but the—we ran across the—we must have run across them in—in school. But we—we had no [unclear] problems, probably because I had a—had rheumatic fever and developed a bad heart when I was seven or eight years old, could not participate in at—in athletics. So I was bookish. [chuckles] I read books. And I couldn't—and all the hearty, rugged Italian guys and Irish guys, they were the ones that went out for football and baseball and—and I just watched.

LEVINE: And then they had their blocks too that were, like, completely Irish or completely Italian?

GANICK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, completely.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: None—no—no—no—oh, no. We were—we were—yeah, in the Catholics and Irish—the Italians and Irish didn't get along that great but they kept their separate—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: But were not—there were no street fights or any—and now, we had an Italian neighbor above us, Mr. Cardinelli. And he was a very, very nice Italian family. They were almost like our family because they'd drop into our house and—and my oldest sister got married and married a butcher. And he came—when he came courting her, he brought his brother, who was also a butcher. And the oldest one married my oldest sister and the other one married my middle sister. So two sisters married two brothers.

And as the result, we had meat and chicken every weekend. And I would—I remember I'd say to my mother—I'd eat occasionally in the Italian houses. And this was the height of the Depression. And I thought we were—I never thought of it but we weren't poor. The Italians and Irish had meat once a year at Easter or Christmas. And we would have it—and I remember I used to say to my mother, "Why can't we—my friends"—the standard food. I thought it was fabulous. I'd eat with some of my Italian friends from school and their mothers would make tremendous bowls of cocoa and buy day-old Italian bread. And you'd dunk the bread into the cocoa. I thought that was the most delicious food I had ever in my life. And I said to my mother, "Why do we have to have meat and chicken again? Again. Why can't we have cocoa and Italian bread?" [chuckles] And this was—this was obviously what poor people ate and—but you—you know, good—good homemade Italian bread, even a day old, dipped in cocoa, oh, it was—it was [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Well, it sounds as though your family in—in a way, flourished during the Depression, what with your mother taking on the foreclosed houses from the bank—

GANICK: Well—

LEVINE: —and—

GANICK: —w—we—we—we didn't flourish but we weren't poor.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GANICK: We weren't poor. We were not on WPA.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

GANICK: And we were not on getting—you know, our neighbors would go up to the center of East Boston and there'd be a surplus crop of grapefruit. And they'd be giving big peck bags of grapefruit. And another week, they'd go up there and they'd be giving big peck bags of potatoes. During the growing season when there was surplus food, Roosevelt had it distributed. And we—I didn't consider ourselves poor. We were—we were better off than our neighbors.

LEVINE: Did your mother still—was your mother still running the store—

GANICK: Yes.

LEVINE: —during the Depression?

GANICK: Oh, she ran the store until she died. She—I was going to school and she developed cancer. And they didn't know it in those days. My mother would be—I learned later on that she would be lying down all day. But about 2:30 when I came home from school she'd get dressed and greet me. And I thought my mother was—and make me something to eat from school and—and we—and we had a—we had a little store. And there was a cash drawer, not a cash register. And there was always change in there. So I would never touch it unless my mother gave me permission to take three cents or a nickel out. And so with that amount, there was money and there's food. And we—my mother made us shirts and undershirts and clothes. It's when I—[chuckles] when I went off to art school and there was a girl in my class, Clapp [PH], Virginia Clapp, because I finally ended up marrying a girl called Virginia Lapp [PH].

LEVINE: [chuckles]

GANICK: So Virginia Clapp, her father owned a big shoe business. And she once—she drove a car. We didn't ever have a car. She drove a car and she once drove me someplace. And I went down and there was a—a brand new roadster. I had never in my life—in our neighborhood there were old, beat up Model T Fords and old, beat up—and I remember the upholstery was all [chuckles]—and then I began to realize that there were people who were called rich. I never—no, we—we never needed money in the life we led. The only money we needed was to pay taxes to the city of Boston. But we had meat. We had food.

LEVINE: And shelter.

GANICK: There was a little—a little income that came—very little near the end—that came in from the store. And—

LEVINE: Were you renting out—was your mother renting out those houses that—

GANICK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Apartments in them?

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GANICK: And no one ever paid their rent. They couldn't. And we used to have to—for them to get a big bag of fruit, we used to have to sign a card saying they paid their rent. And—and my mother felt so sorry for them because, people, she'd sign them sometime when they even didn't pay their rent. And they—we—these were people who—we had people didn't

pay their rent, I know, four or five, six months, seven months. So if they gave my mother $2 towards the rent, that was—that was a lot of money. And—and—and the city of Boston—my mother was a genius on—anytime people came from the city of Boston, [chuckles] first thing she would say with them, "Come on in. We'll have a cup of tea." And my mother made coffeecake. I don't think I ever ate a re—a real cake. But we had coffeecake. And my mother's thing was tea with lemon with coffeecake. "Now, we can talk." [chuckles] The English version—the Russian version of English tea, a big chunk of coffeecake and she would—and my mother was awfully good because she would talk about everything but taxes. "How many children"—she knew them. "How are the kids? How's your wife?" And talk about personal things and [unclear]—you know, "They're giving me an awfully hard time. I've got to get some tax money out of you. But I won't do it this time but next time I have to." [laughter] "They're giving me a hard time." I'd come back and—and my mother would pat 'em on the back and say, "Next time." And she give 'em $5 or—or $4 or—

LEVINE: What—what—do you think there's been any effect on you and your personality, your character, whatever, of having grown up in a family with—with a mother and father who came from Russia and started a new life in this country? Do you think that—that experience rubbed off on you some way?

GANICK: Oh, the family rubbed off on me.

LEVINE: How do you think that immigrant sort of aspect of—of things—do you think it had—what effect do you think, if any, on you?

GANICK: I didn't—the only thing I know is that I grew up in—I was not—I was—I was—yeah, maybe I was considered—years ago, I was considered rich. But my wife came from a family of Norwegians and her father was Jewish. So they were immigrants and wonderful—my mother-in-law was a magnificent person. And what I meant was we—we demanded very little of life.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: We—we didn't want a summer home. We went away to Cape Cod. We didn't want a boat. We didn't want a—a bigger house. We didn't want a—we built a house in a—in Needham and I—when we moved out of our house into this retirement complex, we couldn't bring our big Mason Hamlin [PH] and we gave it to the conservatory. We owned the land down at Cape Cod and not important land, not near the water. And we'd—thinking that someday—we had—we had one son. He's the one who's with me, Peter. And we thought we might like—build a house

down there. And we decided we didn't want to. We didn't want to be confined to a—and we sold the land and this is another story. We sold the land and made a—a very big profit because the—it still wasn't—you know, it was land we maybe bought for three or four thousand dollars. We sold it for 25, which was—and I remember on one big parcel of land we were very—we were symphony goers and we were very interested in symphony. We sold the land and I said to my wife, "What are we going to do with the money?" And I only meant it. There was n—there was nothing we were—that we had been praying we could buy. We didn't want a better car. We drove a good car. So we bought two seats at symphony for ourselves and—and on the seat is—has William H. Ganick and my wife's, Virginia Ganick. And we'd go to concerts and my wife [chuckles] would say, "Polish your nameplate." [chuckles] As—as a joke, and I used to—I used to—and our name was in the lobby on the symphony hall as people who'd pur—purchased seats. And I used to get the warmest, wonderful feeling that my mother knew that a—a Ganick, the sickly one, had our name now in Symphony Hall in Boston, which is a prestigious place. And that used to give me the most fabulous feeling, that—no, a—and I inherited that from my parents, I'm quite sure. Because even though we were poor, we never had a money problem or I—oh, I never heard—I never heard my parents or my—talk about money. We would—I would go to the bank occasionally for them. [chuckles] And we only went to the bank for one purpose, put money in, never take it out. So when we got married, decided we were going to build a house, we decided we'd live with our mother-in-law and accumulate some money to buy a piece of land. And we both had good jobs. I could have gone to a bank and got a mortgage or—we—we both were—had good jobs, and never entered our mind. We lived with my—we lived with my mother-in-law, who refused to take any money. I think she finally was a—agreed that she would take $6 a week from us, providing breakfast and dinner and—and my wife's salary went into the bank every week. And we lived on my salary and we knew where all the free concerts in Boston were. We knew if we went to Waldorf's or Hayes Bickford [PH] before five o'clock, there was a 89-cent dinner. And—and we—we didn't feel deprived or—and then we got enough money and we bought some land in Needham and didn't build, had an architect, believe it or not, design a house for us. And we didn't build for four years while we accumulated enough money to make a down payment on building a house. Then we got a mortgage. And my oldest sister [clears throat]—we lived on a street [clears throat] where there were an awful lot of Cape Cod cottages. The veterans were coming o—home from the World War. And these were wonderful Cape Cod cottages, $8,400.

LEVINE: Hmm.

GANICK: And if you wanted the second floor finished, $9,200. And we were building a house for $11,000 and my oldest sister used to say, "Bill, you're making a terrible mistake, building the most expensive house on the street." [chuckles] And those houses now are $600,000. But this was our—well, I was not aware. We didn't feel the Depression but I knew our neighbors did. I knew my pals did. But we had—we had meat every Sabbath. We had—there was always change in the—not that we needed it. So I was feeling that we were—and no talk of money.

LEVINE: W—w—would you say then that this—this idea that you earned the money first before you—before you think about spending it came from the fact of your—

GANICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: —mother and father and the way they approached—

GANICK: But you didn't go to a bank to take money out.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

GANICK: You went to a bank to put money in.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, actually, the tape is over. We're—just finished a whole hour.

GANICK: Oh.

LEVINE: This has been most interesting.

GANICK: Oh, thank you.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with William Ganick, whose mother and father came through Ellis Island. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]