

EI-1232  
NATHAN STONE  
BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 13, 1910  
INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2002  
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 91  
RUNNING TIME: 52:48  
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.  
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SUNRISE, FLORIDA  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ROBERT STONE, IRV SILBERG

POLAND, 1921  
AGE: 10

SHIP: THE FRANCE  
PORT: LE HAVRE, FRANCE  
RESIDENCES:  
POLAND: ZYDACZOW  
US: NEW YORK, N.Y; CALIFORNIA

LEVINE: It's February the 25th, the year 2002 and I'm here in Sunrise, Florida with Mr. Nathan Stone, who came from Poland when he was 10 years of age in 1921. He left from Le Havre, France and he traveled on the ship called The France. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Would you state your name as it would have appeared on the ship's manifest when you came to this country?

STONE: Naftula -Naftula Shelap.

LEVINE: And when was your name changed?

STONE: When I came here to live with my stepfather. His name was Einstoss. So I changed my name when I-registered me in the third grade under the name of Nathan Einstoss.

LEVINE: How do you spell Anschluss?

STONE: Einstoss-E-I-N-S-T-O-S-S.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then how did you come to Stone after that?

STONE: All right. Now, when I was 17, I entered the Golden Gloves to b-you know, amateur boxing. And my trainer says to me, "Einstoss is a long name to remember. Why don't we call you Stone?" So then when I got married, I legally changed it to Stone.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. All right. Would you state for the tape your birth date and where in Poland you were born?

STONE: I was born in Zydaczow, Poland, small little town, not too far from Strizhi and Lemberg.

LEVINE: Not to far from-

STONE: Strizhi.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: Strizhi.

LEVINE: Okay. And you're spelling that Z-Y-D-O-Z-C-H-O-W.

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: That's the town in Poland.

STONE: Zydaczow.

LEVINE: How do you say it again?

STONE: Zydaczow.

LEVINE: Zydaczow.

STONE: Zydaczow, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Did you stay in Zydaczow up until you left?

STONE: Yes, yes. I was there till I went to-till I was ready to go to America.

LEVINE: Okay. And would you state your birth date?

STONE: 8-13-1910. That's August 13, 1910.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, [clears throat] you said-

STONE: My moth-my mother left me when I was one year old with my grandparents. And she came to America.

LEVINE: Why was that?

STONE: My father had passed away when I was one year old. And so she decided to go to America and bring me over when she got settled. But the war broke out and she couldn't so she waited-she remarried and, 1921, she brought me over.

LEVINE: Mmm. Now, who did you live with when you-when your mother wasn't there? And who did you live with then-

STONE: I lived with my stepfather and my mother.

LEVINE: No, before.

STONE: I lived with my grandparents.

LEVINE: I see.

STONE: In Europe, I mean, I live with my grandparents, who was my mother's father and mother.

LEVINE: Your mother's father and mother.

STONE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

STONE: Their name was Shimen Shaller and R-Rivka Shaller.

LEVINE: Do you re—you must have lots of memories of them.

STONE: Yes, wonderful people.

LEVINE: How do you remember them? What—

STONE: Well—

LEVINE: —were they like?

STONE: Well, I'll tell you. My-my grandmother was very orthodox. And my grandfather was orthodox but he had a little conservative in him. And I'll tell you a little story what happened. As a child (I must have been about eight) I went to the pasture, you know, to—with the kids after—after we got out of the shul. I didn't go home right away. So when I got home a little later, she says to me, "Where were you?" I says, "I went to the pashe." "You bin gegehen in der pashe [you went to the pasture] on Shabas [Saturday, the Sabbath]? Host nisht gegessen." [you didn't eat] I said, "Ikh hob gegessen un ungebite. Ick hob gegessen die zoerblete [I had a snack, I ate the sour grass leaves] " "Die host gerissen, Shabbos? [You tore on Shabbos] "Ikh hob nisht gerissen. Ikh hob gegessen mit dem moyl." [I didn't tear. I ate, with my mouth] So my grandfather says to her, "Vas vist du von ihm? Er hot nisht gerissen; hot gegessen"

[ "What do you want of him? He didn't tear, he ate." ]

(laughs)

LEVINE: Translate what you just said.

STONE: It means that I went to the pasture with my friends on Shabbos after the shul instead of going home. And while—while we were walking in the pasture we seen these scharf-die scharf blette [sour-grass] the green—the green leaves. And I knew what they were. So if I was hungry, I'd tear, you know, I'd tear 'em up and I'd eat 'em. So when I got home she wanted to know where I was and why I--. "You didn't eat nothing?" I said, "Yeah, Ikh.hob gegessen" [I've eaten] I says, "I bent down and I ate the zauerblatte the scharf ,you know. She says, "Host gerissen? [did you tear] And I says, "No, Ikh hob nisht gerissen Ikh

hob umgebekt].“ [No, I didn't tear, I bent down"] (laughs) . In other words, I bent down and I ate it. That's what I meant.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. [laughs]

STONE: But then my grandfather says, "Leave him alone. "Ér hot nisht gerissen; er hot gegessen" [He didn't eat; so he ate] [laughter]

LEVINE: So they spoke Yiddish, did they?

STONE: Yeah, o-only Yiddish. I didn't know how to speak anything else but Yiddish because during that whole time that I was there, the war was on. So there was no schooling. Towards the end, there was schooling. And they started to—we started to go to school and we had a lot of problems there. The Christian children didn't like the Yiddishe [Jewish] children so we—they always picked on us and the teachers wouldn't do anything about it. It was really rough. That's how—you know, and I was glad to go to America when they told me I was going to go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, so in other words, you didn't start school till after the war was over.

STONE: Right. When I came here—that's right. And when I came here they put me in the 3A and I had a wonderful teacher by the name of Miss Kitchell . And she took a liking to me. She saw I wanted to learn and she used to help me on the English.

LEVINE: Wow. Okay. Well, what do you personally remember about the war years?

STONE: All I remember is that in—when the Russians came in we had to get into covered wagons and go out of town in covered wagons.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: The whole town used to run away. And then after the war ended, then we had the Cossacks coming in on horses. And all they wanted was food, eggs, anything at all. They were hungry too. But they were also murderers. Sometimes, they'd just go like this with a kni—with a sword [makes tapping sound] and go like this to you. And the next ti—and every time we heard that they were coming in, we used to get out of town. One time, what happened is when they—when they came in we were too late to get out of town. So we all went into a—one large building in the town, the whole—anybody that could get in there got into the basement. So we stayed there for a week. And all we had to eat was a crumb of bread and the water that they used to take out from the barrels in the rain—the rain into the barrel and strain the water and give us the drink. And this is the way we lived for a week.

LEVINE: About how many people?

STONE: Oh, there was—I don't know. Maybe a—a couple of hundred.

LEVINE:        Hmm.

STONE:        But you seen those people, the way they starved in the summer, died right there. This is what I remember. Also, one day, the shooting stopped while we were in the—in the—in that cellar. And our house was about a block and a half away from that big building. So my mother—my grandmother says to me that she has a—a bread in the house, that she remembers having a bread in the house and she's going to get it. The shooting stopped. So she says to me, [unclear], "Stay here," which I didn't. I ran after her. And as soon as we got into the house, the shooting started again.

LEVINE:        Oh.

STONE:        So we laid down on the floor. But anyway, I had the biggest, best meal of my life. She gave me a piece of bread and she gave me a piece of garlic. And I rubbed it into it and that was my meal like a—like a gourmet meal.

LEVINE:        Hmm.

STONE:        This is what I remember.

LEVINE:        Hmm.

STONE:        And this is the way we suffered there during the whole war. And also, when the Cossacks came in they always went after the men. They always tried to kill the men. I don't know why but—so my grandfather used to hide in the—in the beys medrish, which is the temple, above the stove and he stayed there. And we used to try to bring him food. It so happened to be I had an uncle that had a—a bakery in town. And it was right near the—the temple so his son used to bring him over a little food. But he had to hide there for a week. He hide—on the top of the stove.

LEVINE:        Hmm.

STONE:        That's how bad it was, until the shooting stopped, until they stopped coming in. Then we got back again. But we suffered a lot during the war.

LEVINE:        Yeah.

STONE:        Yeah.

LEVINE:        Can you describe the Cossacks?

STONE:        Well, they were—most of them were very, very husky men with the—you know, with those Russian hats. And they rode on horseback, mostly. And they always had swords with them and rifles. Swords and ri—

LEVINE:        Mmm.

STONE: They were very mean people, very mean, the Russians. The Russian Cossacks.

LEVINE: Were-were the people in your town Jewish, all of them?

STONE: No, no. I would say maybe-maybe 10 percent, 15 percent at most. Most of them-that's about all. Most of them were gen-gentile. A lot of them were-most of them were - were farmers. Also, my grandfather-and when the-when the-before-before the-the Russians came in, he was like the gabe to the rabbi, the servant to the rabbi, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And he also used to take care of the mikvah [ritual bath]. They made the mikvah. And I used to go to the woods and help him chop the wood to prepare-to prepare-to put it in-to put the-the wood into the stove-

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: -on a Friday-on a Friday during the day to warm up the mikvah for the women to come to bathe. And this is what-and I always was with him. I always followed him around. He also was part of the undertaker in the town. And I used to watch him, the way he prepared and put on the shroud and all. And also, I used to go to the-they started-one day, he told me that they're starting to steal the plums from the trees and also the apples that were in the trees in the cemetery. And he wants to find out who they are. So he's going to the cemetery, so I went with him. So we stayed there till late at night watching to see if anybody comes.

And so far, nobody came and we went home again. But the -- he had a-he had his finger in everything. He even knew how to-how to be a shokhet [ritual slaughterer]. He was a-he knew how to k-you know, kill the chickens. They called that a shokhet. So I mean, a lot of memories from-but when-there was no war there, it was-you know, it was all right till I-till the-then when the war started when I was about-already about five, six years old, then-then-then things got rough when the Russians came in. We used to run away. The Germans were on our side at that time.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: The Germans were-in the First World War, Germans were on our side.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: So were there Germans around too?

STONE: Ah-

LEVINE: That you knew-that you ever saw?

STONE: Yes, yes. But they were good. They were all right, the Germans, when they passed through the little town. Yeah.

LEVINE: And when the Russians passed through-

STONE: Oh, they were mean.

LEVINE: What would they do? Would they-would they occupy houses and-

STONE: Yes. They were always-they're always wanted something to eat. They'd come in and they-they'd look in the-all over to see if you have any food. And sometimes, they get rough and they give you-you know, like this, hit you. That's what they did, a lot of woman too. They rape a lot of woman too. That's what they did.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

STONE: Yeah, it was a rough-it was a rough deal.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And I never thought I'll survive [chuckles] when I was there.

LEVINE: Oh. You-did you live in fear? Would you say you lived in fear?

STONE: I-at that age, I don't think I lived in fear.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: Yeah, I figured it was part of life, you know. [chuckles] I was always on my grandparents, you know.

LEVINE: Were you the only child that they had-

STONE: I was the on-

LEVINE: -with them?

STONE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you must have been kind of special. I mean-

STONE: Special, I mean other-the only one? [chuckles]

LEVINE: The only one.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: But I mean, yeah.

STONE: Yeah, my grand-my grandmother always, when I was good, used to put her hand on my head when I was good.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And she'd say, "Nur leben bis ein hundert und tzvantzik"—you should only live to 120."

LEVINE: Ah.

STONE: [laughs]

LEVINE: Well—

STONE: So I'm trying. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah, you are. You're—you're getting warm. [laughter]

STONE: So we had wonderful—wonderful grandparents.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Let's see. How about the relations between the Jews and the gentiles in your town?

STONE: It wasn't bad. Wasn't—no, it wasn't—really good. We used to get along pretty good. There was no problem.

LEVINE: And the—and the—the gentiles were ma—mainly farmers and the—were the Jewish people merchants? Was that—

STONE: Ah, yes. Yes.

LEVINE: —typical?

STONE: Yeah, yes. Mostly merchants. Yes, yes. And we had a gentile shoemaker and he was wonderful. And the whole town used him, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

STONE: And then I had an uncle, my grandfather's son that came—that came home after the war, right after the war and he was a carpenter. In the service, they made him a—in the service, he was a—he used to pick up the—the people that had been wounded during the war. And he used to take 'em into the hospital. Well, when he came home he was a carpenter by trade. And he start making all the caskets for everybody, especially the—the gentile people as they used to—coming out of town. And they used to—and they used to buy these caskets. Well, he had competition. He had another man trying to—was also making. So he used to go and, when the train came into the town and he knew there'd be some people there looking for caskets, so he'd go there and—and approach these people. And then he trained me to do that as a kid. I should ask if they need a casket. [laughs]

LEVINE: So in other words, a train'd pull into the station.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: People would get off and you'd go up to them?

STONE: Yeah, ask them if they need a casket. That's the kind of upbringing I had.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Could you talk about how-how the dead were treated? In other words, you said your grandfather-what-what was the ritual? Was-can you remember how it was done? How-how the body was treated or how the-the-

STONE: You mean the Cossacks?

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, no. I meant the-actually, you and your-and your grandfather and any-anybody who died, how-

STONE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The-the-in other words, what they'd do, they'd put you into the casket and then they-y-take the bottom off the casket and they put you-put the-the frame around you and they put you in the grave just on a-on a pillow and a sheet.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: And that's the way they buried you in-in the orthodox religion, just with a frame around you. And then they put what was on the bottom on the top. And then they put the earth-

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: -on top of it. That's the way they buried them.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: That's still the-still the orthodox way of doing it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Were there-how-what was your religious life like in-

STONE: Well, I-I was very-I was orthodox. I used to have the curls.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: Yes, I used to have the curls and-and I used to go with the other kids, you know, but we didn't-we weren't able to go to kheder [primary school] because the war years were on, you know, but whatever I heard in the temple, I remembered.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: In other words, I used to-I used to pray the-the ritual that they do, like, minchah, mariv [afternoon and evening prayers] and at-at-at night, I knew it by heart already. The brukha [blessing] for the Torah, I knew at that age already because I used to listen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And when the kohens [cohen priests] got up and dikhen [priestly blessing], I used to remember what they used to say. You know, as a kid, you remember all that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: But it was on—on a orthodox way. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: But I didn't know—I—I never knew—I—never had time to teach me how to read. Never had time. Always—it was all in my memory.

LEVINE: Wow, uh-huh.

STONE: I can still make—I can make out some words today a little bit but—but not—not the way, if I went to kheder.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: I never went to kheder.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Uh-huh. So wh—what did you do as a little boy to play? Did you play? What did you do?

STONE: Yes. We used to have—we used to take a small stick and put it on a stone. We used to take another stick and hit it. And we used to call that game, "Kishke kalesdera." [PH]

LEVINE: [chuckles] What does—

STONE: They have that gave here too.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

STONE: In other words, they take a small stick about six, eight inches long and they put it up this way. The stone is underneath. And then they take another stick, a long stick, and you hit it like that. You hit it in the front and the back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: That's the game we played.

LEVINE: Well, k—what is—kish—

STONE: Kishke kalesdera.

LEVINE: What does that mean? Translate.

STONE: [chuckles] I don't know what it means.

LEVINE: [laughs]

STONE: But that's what they call it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, all right. [laughs]

STONE: But that was the name of the game.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

STONE: That was the name of that game.

LEVINE: Let's see. S-

STONE: And also, we used to go to the pasture. We used to run around and play in it. You know, hide and seek and all that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about any music, any singing, any dancing, any-anything like that?

STONE: Nothing-nothing-nothing like that.

LEVINE: And was your-

STONE: We had nothing like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Not during the war years. No, nothing.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: Even before. Before, they c-they came in, we didn't have none of that. But the only singing they had was in a temple, you know, they'd sing some of the prayer songs. That's about it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about the house you lived in with your grandparents? Do you-can you describe it?

STONE: Yeah, we lived in-in fact, we lived in a little house in back of a temple. It had one big room and one small room where it had a stove. And we used to have to get water from the town pump and bring it in into a barrel. And we slept on mattresses. That's the way we slept in that-.

LEVINE: There were no beds, just mattresses.

STONE: No beds, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah, no beds. We were very poor. And we lived in a—just in back of the temple, just my—my grandfather was the shamus [deacon] of the temple. So they gave him that old house and that's where we lived.

LEVINE: Was it made out of stone? Was it made out of—

STONE: No, wood.

LEVINE: —wood?

STONE: Wood.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wood.

STONE: A wood house, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so did you have any animals or grow anything—

STONE: No.

LEVINE: —for your own consumption—

STONE: No, no. No.

LEVINE: No.

STONE: No. Well, we had—we had plenty of chickens all the time because the farmers in the town—we had—they were giving them way -- they were selling chickens.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And do you remember anything else about the Polish people, the gentiles in the town?

STONE: The ones that I knew—the ones that I knew were—were very nice people. It's just some of the kids that we had it rough after the war then when I started to go to school. It was really rough. But otherwise, we—I—my grandfather used to mingle with them. They were farmers. He used to buy chickens from them and all, you know, and fruit and everything else from them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: We had no problem.

LEVINE: What was school like over there?

STONE: This was rough, as I said, over there. When I—when I tell you, the teachers were—wouldn't—wouldn't butt in when the kids started out with—

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: They wouldn't do nothing.

LEVINE: I see.

STONE: I—I'd stay there and all of a sudden, a guy, a kid'd go back and give me a zetz, . you know, hit me. And the teacher shtoydesin [not understood] [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Uh-huh, yeah. So—

STONE: Kid suffer there.

LEVINE: When was it—how come you came to this country at the pre—at the time that you did?

STONE: Well, my—as I say, my mother remarried and she brought me over. And I lived with my stepfather and two stepsisters.

LEVINE: Did your mother physically come to Poland and get you or—

STONE: No, no, no.

LEVINE: No.

STONE: I came over here with my cousin.

LEVINE: With your cousin.

STONE: Yeah, my cousin.

LEVINE: And—and how old was your cousin?

STONE: He was 10 years older than I was.

LEVINE: Oh, so he was 20 and you were 10.

STONE: Yeah, right. Right.

LEVINE: And was your cousin immigrating at the same time or what?

STONE: No, he—my mother and my aunt brought—or my aunt brought them over, sent the shifcard [ship ticket] for him and my mother sent the shifcard for me. She—you know what a shifcard is, don't you?

LEVINE: Well, say it for the tape.

STONE: Yeah, the card that—to come here. And w—and the experience that I had on the ship, we were in steerage and we used to sleep in bunk beds, like this. And we didn't have any cold water to drink in that particular area. All they had was warm water. So when we wanted the—when you—so, want a soda, you didn't -- since I have no money to buy a soda, so I saw what the other people did. They used to take the warm water, put it in a bottle, put a piece of rope on it and hang it on the railing on the—on the ship, on the deck on the railing, you know, so it'll get cold. The water'll get cold when he—and I did that too. And—but what I did, I did it on the fence that opened up. They caught me by

my legs. I could have been in the ocean. [chuckles] Best experience that I had coming over. After that, he had money to pay to—to buy me soda.

LEVINE: Ah.

STONE: I shouldn't go up there again. [laughter]

LEVINE: So—so in other words, your cousin's mother had also come here.

STONE: My—in other words, my cousin's—in other words, my mother's sister's son came with me.

LEVINE: But hi—but his mother was already here?

STONE: No, his mother was still there.

LEVINE: Oh, oh.

STONE: No, he came here with me. We stayed—he stayed with my mother's sister, who lived in Brooklyn, and I stayed with my mother, lived in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Ah.

STONE: And then after I got here, things got a little wild. My mother had a little problem with the—with the stepchildren. They wouldn't listen. And things got a little rough there so my mother says to me, "If—why don't you go live with my—with your—with your aunt in Brooklyn?" So [chuckles] she saw I was aggravated with what was happening. So I live with my aunt in Brooklyn—

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: —until—until I was about 14 or 15. Yeah, 15. I quit school and she told me that my father, who was a shirt operator, my stepfather, lost his job. And they need my—they grad—the stepchildren were already out. So she asked me would I move back because I had a job. I used to work in a garage 12 hours a night, seven days a week for \$12 to learn how to be an automobile mechanic. So they taught me how to grease a car and how to put—tighten body bolts and mount tires and all, which I learned. So going home with a trolley car one day on the Empire Boulevard in Brooklyn was the King's County Buick. And I see a sign, "Mechanic's helpers wanted."

So I got off and I went in there and I found out that they—they asked me the—"What do you know?" I said, "Well, I know how to mount tires, how to fix a tire." "Well, you're okay. You know how to tighten body bolts?" I says, "Sure." And they showed me what I had to do, put on bumpers and bumperettes and so on. I says, "Sure, I can do that." So I says, "What are you going to pay?" He says, "Twenty-seven dollars a week." He says, "When are you going to start?" I says, "Now." So I call up the candy store and I tell my mother to tell them—and tell the

candy store guy to tell my mother that I'm not going to be home, I'm working late. Okay? Well, he never did. So when I got home my mother says to me, "Wie --where you been? What happened?" You know? So told her. When I told her what I'm making she didn't say nothing. She said, "Oy, oy vey, Got hot geholfen." [Woe, woe. God has helped] [chuckles] That's the story.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's backtrack a minute. Do you remember leaving your little town?

STONE: Yes.

LEVINE: W-what was it like? The departure? When you-when you-

STONE: Oh, I-

LEVINE: When your cousins-

STONE: I-I hated to leave my grandmother, grand-- . I-really, also, my-my aunt and all-I really felt that way, even-I was a kid then, nine, ten years old. And we went from there-let's see now. We went from there to Warsaw, from Warsaw to Germany, from Germany to Le Havre.

LEVINE: And how long did it take you? Were you on trains or how did you go?

STONE: Yeah, on trains. All on trains. All on trains. I don't remember how many-how long it took. Must have taken a week or two. They-because we stayed over, you know, a couple days here and there. And when we got to Le Havre they shaved m-our heads to make sure we had no lice and all, you know, before the-they put us on the ship.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: And that's what we went through.

LEVINE: Was it-well, it must have been an eye opener for you because, had you-had been anyplace, like to Warsaw or anywhere else?

STONE: No, and only thing I knew was the little town that I lived in. That's the only-

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: That's all I knew.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: I didn't know any other place.

LEVINE: Yeah. So-so how did you feel, as a little 10-year-old? How would you describe yourself, this little boy leaving Poland at that age? What kind of a little boy were you?

STONE: To me—to me, it was wonderful. I'm going to America.  
[laughs]

LEVINE: Do you know what you had heard about America?

STONE: Sure, sure.

LEVINE: What?

STONE: Oh, America, the golden medina [the golden state]. You know, they used to tell me that as a kid. And my mother is there, after all, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Were—

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Were you—were you just plain looking forward to seeing your mother or were you—were you a little bit—

STONE: No, no, no.

LEVINE: —timid about—

STONE: I—no, just know I was going to America. And I didn't even know my mother.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: All I had was a picture.

LEVINE: That's right, yeah. Okay, so—

STONE: But when I got here, everything w—went fine with her.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island?

STONE: All I remember is that we had to k—be very quiet, [chuckles] stand on line and not open our mouths. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: And -- I'm trying to remember—

LEVINE: Can you describe what you—what it looked like or any incidents with other people or—

STONE: Well, they were the best—the long—the high desks and there was men standing in front of them taking down all the paraphernalia, name and so on and so on. I remember that. But that's about it.

LEVINE: How about examinations there?

STONE: Oh, yeah. Before—before they'd put you on the boat, they— they examined you and make sure and the—you had no lice and everything else. Yeah. Yeah, and—and then—when you—marching down on [unclear] from the inspectors you got to be very, very quiet and just, don't say nothing. [laughs]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay. So—and—and what was your cousin like, the one you were traveling with?

STONE: Well, he was a—as I say, he was 20 years old. He—he's a very nice, gentle man, very nice.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: But he was cheap. He didn't want to buy me soda.

LEVINE: [laughs] Okay. So who met you? Who met you and your cousin?

STONE: Oh, yeah. My—my—my aunt's son. He came here as a baby. And my stepfather and my mother.

LEVINE: And what was that like, seeing your mother and stepfather?

STONE: W—well, to me, it was like heaven. I mean, it was—to—to know that I had a mother. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: So I didn't have a father. You know, he died when I was a year old.

LEVINE: Yeah. So did you—did you take to your mother and stepfather?

STONE: Yes, very m—my stepfather was a wonderful man. He—he even liked me so much. He really did. He acted like he was my father. The only problem was he was also a sick man of 45. He had a stroke.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: Yeah. But we used to get along beautifully.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: I got along with my step sisters too but my mother had a problem with my step sisters.

LEVINE: So when you left Ellis Island, where did you go?

STONE: Right to my mother—to my mother's house. Yeah.

LEVINE: And where was that?

STONE: On Lower East Side. East Fifth Street, New York, Manhattan.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: Yeah, between C and D, just a block away from the East River. And we lived on the fourth floor walkup and, with the stoop, it's like five floors, railroad flat. We had the—in the kitchen, we had a washtub where we used to do our w—our laundry and also, we used to bathe in. And we also had a—an icebox in the kitchen with a pan underneath it with the ice we used to put in there. And we needed ice, we used to buy a nickel's worth of ice and they used to bring it up four floors for us. And that's where we lived. And then when we had to dry the clothes, we had a line outside the kitchen window to a pole that we used to hang our clothes up. And the—in the living room we had a fire escape. In the summer, we used to sle—sleep on the fire escape or we used to sleep on the roof because it was too warm. And my mother was good to me. She gave me the—the last bedroom because it had a—a door leading out to the hall to the toilet in the hall.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A] [BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

STONE: The hall also had a dumbwaiter where we used to have to pull down into the—into the basement and bring up the coal and pails from the bin to make the stove in the kitchen. This was the way we lived. And—and one day, she—she told me, you know, "We can't afford to live here, \$6 a month rent. I'll have to take in a boarder." She says, "Do you mind if I—I—I'm going to give him your room." I said, "Where will I sleep?" She says, "You'll sleep on the washtub in the kitchen. I'll put bet gevant [bed clothes] there. That's where you'll sleep." That's when she sent me to my aunt afterwards. [laughs]

LEVINE: So in other words, it was your mother, your stepfather, his two daughters.

STONE: No, my—my stepfather.

LEVINE: So, stepfather, his two daughters—

STONE: Yeah. They were already—

LEVINE: —you and a boarder.

STONE: Yeah, they—they were—no, the boarder—they were out of the hou—

LEVINE: Oh, they were out by then.

STONE: They were out of the house already. The only one was there—I was the only one left then -- when I came back. Anyway, th—that's the story.

LEVINE: Hmm. So do you remem-were you there for some period with the boarder? Or not for very long?

STONE: Yes, for a little while. Yes, for a little while, I was there.

LEVINE: And what-and what was the b-how did your mother-what did your mother do for the boarder? Did she feed the boarder-

STONE: No, no. No. All-all-all he did was live there and -- in the morning, yes. In the morning, she h-he-she had breakfast for him, I remember that. That's about all. But one day-this was a-this was a true story. One day, he told me a story. Maybe he put a little fun into it. He says, "You know, my-you know, I lo- I work in the - the garment center." he says, "Let me tell you about these two men that-in the garment center. They made so much money in 15 years they didn't know what to do with the money. So they bought a safe and they put it in -- like for petty cash. But after 15 years, they couldn't look at each other. They couldn't stand each other. They had two different life styles. One used to go to go to Kiamesha Lake, to the Concord. The one used to go to go to Kuferlein [ph] in Monticello." He says, "And when they came to work, when they had to talk business they talked with their mouths on the side. And one would say, 'You should lose everything you got and then should come to me. I should help you out and I shouldn't have it to give it to you.' The other one says, 'You should lose all your teeth except one and that one should be left with a toothache. And by the way, it's 12 o'clock. Let's go down and eat.' So they get downstairs. He says to him, 'You know, I forgot to close - I forgot to close the safe.' He says, 'What are worrying about? We're both here.'"

"So they're going to Hymie's Restaurant. So instead of sitting on one table, they sit at two different tables." This is the story he told me. "So, one orders the steak. He takes a st- a pi-a knife, cuts off a piece of steak and puts it in his pocket. And the waiter says, 'It's your steak. It's your mon-why would you do that?' He says, 'You see that guy sitting over there? That's my partner's geshossen zol er veren [he should get shot] . I know what he thinks and I know what he wishes. And he wishes I should choke on the first bite.'" This the story he told me.

LEVINE: [laughs]

STONE: Whether it's true or not, I don't know. [chuckles] But it's a j-like a joke.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Now, was he-was he also from Poland? Do you know?

STONE: I don't think so. I think he-he was from Russia. He was from Russia, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Okay. So you started school—did you start school while you were living in the Lower East Side?

STONE: Yes, I went to P.S. 15 and I had Miss Kitchell, very nice teacher and P.S. 15, was right across the street from my—from my building.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: All I had to walk was across the street and—

LEVINE: And Miss Kitchell took you under her wing?

STONE: Yeah, yeah. And she did—a wonderful lady. Yeah, and I learned how to speak a little bit and then that helped. And I had nice friends there, used to play. Very nice. We used to play stoop ball where we used to take and put a ball—they had a—this way a -- on the stoop. But it was a—and then we had a—across the street we had a—when we had to get milk we had to go into the milk store. And they used to take it out of the can and put it into your container.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: I remember that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: And then we had a candy store across the street and we used to hang out there.

LEVINE: Anything else about the Lower East Side that you remember?

STONE: Well, when I—when I came back when I was 15, I made friends with some fellows that lived around—around the—when—went to school together. And they used to hang out on Houston and Clinton. And one of the boy's fathers had a pushcart there and he used to sell fruit and stuff like that. And then we used to hang out in Hymies candy store on the Lower East Side on—on Houston Street just a block away from Katz's Delicatessen and two blocks away from Yonah Shimmels. And we used to play ball on Houston Street and we used to play cards in the candy store. And we were a group that we grew up together, 12 fellows, 12 of us. And we all got married and we were very, very compatible.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: All the women were compatible and we used to play cards in each other's houses, went on for years. And—and of course, when we got older there, some of them moved here. About four or five of them moved in the first three. And when I came here, also, they—I was—and then now—by now, they're all—there's only one left out of the three—out of the four, one—one couple left. And that's the story.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. So—

STONE: But I know a lot about the East Side. I mean, I used to—I used to walk from the Delancey Street down to Fifth Street when I used to get off—when I lived there when I used to work in Brooklyn while I worked on 35th Street and Avenue I in the garage. And I used to take the trolley car, the Flatbush Avenue trolley car. And then I used to take the Tompkins Avenue car to Delancey Street, and then I used to walk home—

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: —to Fifth Street.

LEVINE: Did the trolley go over—no. The trol—did the trolley go over the bridge?

STONE: Y—no. The—the—there—there was a little shr—shr—yeah, the Tompkins Avenue trolley car. Yeah.

LEVINE: Went over which bridge? Do you remember?

STONE: The Williamsburg Bridge.

LEVINE: Williamsburg, uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Right to Delancey Street. Right?

STONE: Yeah, right. Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: Yeah?

STONE: Yeah. I was about—I was about 15 years old then. And of course, th—you know, I—I got the e—my education by going to school as much as I can when I was off at night and—because I quit in the 7A.

LEVINE: Okay. So you—how long did you go to school in the Lower East Side, about?

STONE: The Lower East Side, I went for about a year or two years.

LEVINE: And then you went to Brooklyn.

STONE: And then—then I went—go live my aunt, yeah.

LEVINE: And when you were with your aunt you continued school?

STONE: P.S. 20 and 129 on Gates [PH] Avenue, yeah.

LEVINE: And were you able to speak English by the time you got to—

STONE: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: -Brooklyn?

STONE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So-so then you stayed in school until-

STONE: 7A.

LEVINE: -7A. And-

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what per-

STONE: I went to work.

LEVINE: What-what made you start to work then?

STONE: Because my-my mother needed-needed money. She needed money so I got a-I got that job in the garage, 35th Street and Avenue I in Flatbush and I was working 12 nights a week-for \$12 a week and they taught me how to be an automobile mechanic. And then, as I had said before, after that, I became a mechanic on printing presses.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: I worked on that and then I became a-my wife's father knew me when I lived in Brooklyn because we lived in the same building. He-he had a tailor store there, my wife's father. And he also used to fix pressing machines. So when he heard I was a mechanic, called me, or told my aunt about it and my aunt came and told me he wants to see me. So when I came over he says to me, "I'd like you to work with me because I'm fixing pressing machines and my wife is staying in the store taking care of the store." That's when I met my wife when-I met my wife when I was 10 years old when I lived there. You understand? So when I came there I was already 15. You know, it was a different-a different world. So I fell in love with my wife and I stayed -- I worked with him. I became a-a-a mechanic on pressing machines and boilers that the tailors and cleaners used to press the clothes.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: And-and then I went in business with him, were in business together. And then we took in a-another-some-[unclear] Flarey [PH]. And my father-in-law and him couldn't get along so I stayed with him for a while. And then I got out and then I went in for myself. I went to-I went to California and I became a distributor for the Mum [PH] Boiler Company. And they had a-a convention, Chicago, and they sent me there to represent them. So from Chicago, I came back and I asked my wife to go back with me to California and she didn't want to. So I opened a-a-a parts store for pressing machines and boilers on the Lower East Side on Broome Street.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: And that—

LEVINE: And b—are you saying boilers?

STONE: Yeah, boilers.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm.

STONE: Steam boilers.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And then I stayed on Broome Street and I—I sold all those parts. And when the war broke out, they—they needed mechanics to work on the—on the ships and—and the uniform plants. They needed pressing machines. And so I got a hold of half my machinery and I made a—and they hired me and I started working on all these—on all these uniform plants. So they wouldn't draft me anyway because I was—I was—they needed me, period, and wouldn't draft me. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: I had already had a child so that's how I got away with being in the war. So I was actually—worked on ships and I worked on uniform plants with these pressing machines.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: Yeah. And then I—when I—when, later on years, I—after the war, I teamed up with two men. One used to work as—put up laundries. And he had a franchise for Westinghouse with commercial laundry machinery. And the other one had a franchise for dry cleaning machinery. And I had my own boiler that I designed for the pressing machines. So we m—bought a building on Jericho Turnpike, 13 East Jericho Turnpike. And we got in together and we started building Laundromats and dry cleaning stores and put people in business.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: And that was my business. And then I retired in 1972.

LEVINE: Hmm. And wh—where does the boxing fit in?

STONE: Oh, that came in when I was 17 when I was on the—

LEVINE: Is it—why don't you talk about that?

STONE: —Lower East Side. When I was on the Lower East Side, yeah, I trained in the Seward Gym where Sutaras [PH], Ruby Goldstein and all—all those fellows were there.

LEVINE: Well, are you saying Sewer?

STONE: Seward Gym.

LEVINE: S-

STONE: That's a-yeah, there's a street there called Seward Street-

LEVINE: Oh, Seward.

STONE: -on the Lower East Side.

LEVINE: Okay.

STONE: It's ri-right near East Broadway.

LEVINE: Oh, all right.

STONE: Yeah, that's where I trained and, as I say, when I started, [chuckles] he says, "Your name"-when-I told you before, he says, "Your name is too big." [laughter] So then when I got married, I changed it-

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: -to Stone.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah, I had a couple of fights and that was it. After a couple of black eyes, had enough. [laughter]

LEVINE: Well, w-were you-from the time the Polish kids picked on you, d-were you a-were you a fighter w-when you were growing up?

STONE: No, I-I didn't fight back. I didn't fight back. I was told not to. I was told not to because it would get worse. When he gave me a punch, I just looked at him. You know-you know, they told me not to.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: They warned me because otherwise it would be a-a continuous fight and I didn't fight back. But right after that, I-I started coming to America so it was no problem.

LEVINE: And what about-were you treated like a greenhorn? Were you teased when you came here at all?

STONE: No, no. No, the kids were very nice P.S. 15. I had no problem.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

STONE: Yeah. She sat me in the front too. [laughter] She took a liking to me. She saw I wanted to learn, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: To be able to remember that at 91 is something. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. [chuckles] You have a great memory. Well, how about your father-in-law? Was he an immigrant? Did he—had he immigrated to this country?

STONE: Yes. He was a—he was a—he was young. He was very young that he came here. He and a—he and his mother, he and his wife, yeah—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: —both came from Russia. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: I have a picture inside of him.

LEVINE: And—and—oh, good. And what was your wife's name?

STONE: Helen.

LEVINE: And her—her maiden name?

STONE: Her maiden name was G-O-I-V-A, Goiva. And some people spelled it G-A-E-V-R and—some people in the family. But they spelled it G-O-I-V-A. And my father-in-law was also—in Eddie Cantor's time, was also on the stage. He used to be a comedian too.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: And—and then he opened up these cleaning stores. That's what he did. That's—then he made a living out of that and then he became a mechanic on pressing machines. And that's how I joined him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you and your wife have children?

STONE: We had two sons, yes.

LEVINE: And their names?

STONE: And their name is R—Bob and Sheldon.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

STONE: And I have four grandchildren and the youngest now are 24—24 and 25. The youngest are, like, 24 and 25 today.

LEVINE: Huh, uh-huh.

STONE: And then I have my oldest granddaughter, who became an attorney and—had a beautiful job here in—working for a corporation, lawyers, in New Jersey. And she got an offer in Israel. So she went to Israel and became a partner in Israel in a law firm. And she's been there 10 years. She married an Israel man and they just had a baby in June and we named it after my wife. My wife died in January and, in June, we named the baby. Now, she's coming in for Easter—

LEVINE: Wow.

STONE: —to New York so we're going—I'm going in there to see her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah. We named—named her Hila for Helen, Hila.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: That's a Hebrew name.

LEVINE: So that's your first great grandchild.

STONE: My-my first great. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, what do you feel very proud of? What gives you satis—

STONE: Oh, my family. My family.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: They keep calling me—all my son, like clockwork, every Wednesday between 12 and 12:30. My older—my older son calls me at least once a m—once every two weeks.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: At least.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And my grandchildren call me and the—the cards. [chuckles] You ought to read them cards. Nobody better living. [laughs] They're some wonderful cards.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah, on my 90th birthday, they all came together and we met a—we went—over one of the country clubs here.

LEVINE: Oh.

STONE: Very nice.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: They all came down.

LEVINE: Great. Let's see. H-d-do you think—or in what way do you think, coming here as a 10-year-old and changing your life, changing in the culture that you lived in—what impact do you think that experience had on you?

STONE: Well, when I came here—when I came here and I got off the ship, believe it or not, I bent down and I kissed the floor because I knew—we were starving there, you know. Even after the war, it wasn't too good for us. And I appreciated everything that I had here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: But everything worked out beautifully. I had no—no problem. I mean, I worked hard but — it's part of life. I—you know. And it worked out all right. I met my—my wife when I was 10 years old when I came to live with—with my aunt in—in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: So I knew her all my life, actually. I was 10 years old.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: And we had 67 years together.

LEVINE: Oh, that's great.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: Yeah, last year, she went.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: But my family is a wonderful family and I have no problem. And I tell you, I'm not lonely because I have my neighbors next door. One of them, she's my dance partner -- I go dancing at least once a week with her. And I have a—a neighbor upstairs the same way. They keep calling me all the time. And I have woman—one woman that I've been walking with now for 12 and a half years. She's only 53.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: And she has two daughters, 25. So they're always coming over there like they adopted me as their father. [chuckles] You'd be surprised. I stay—my neighbors see me walking with a 25-year-old. [laughs] We walk everyday.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: I do a—at least—in the morning, I average three—three—five days a week, three miles a day. And then I go dancing at least once a week, sometimes twice a week. So I have a lot of dance partners.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: So I keep in shape.

LEVINE: Yeah. Good. Great.

STONE: So for a greenhorn, I did all right. [chuckles]

LEVINE: I would say so. Yes. [clears throat] Let's see. How about your trip to Ellis Island? Did that have a special meaning for you?

STONE: Yes, yes. When I got off—when I got on—I mean, it was like coming off the ship alone was heaven.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: Because I was sick.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: It was in steerage and it was rough. It was really a rough, rough trip. I think it was about a two-week trip, at least 14 days, yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: Yeah. But as I say, they wouldn't a caught me by my legs I would have been in the ocean, to heat up the bottle of water. [chuckles]

LEVINE: To cool it down, right?

STONE: To cool it down, yeah.

LEVINE: Put it in the wa—yeah. Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about the incident of the World Trade tower bombing? Did—what was your—

STONE: Oh,

LEVINE: —reaction to that?

STONE: Oh, oh, oh. I cried. I cried. I cried so much when I—when I saw that. I'm weak when it comes to that. I always get tears.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

STONE: I go over to—when I see my—when I go—and my wife is buried right here in the Star of David. And I go there at least once a month. I—I still can't get over it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: Hurts. It hurts.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, you were there.

STONE: I cry very easily, very easily. So now, I—we have—in the clubhouse we have a minyan [quorum] on Friday night and on Saturday. So I joined to—to say kaddish [prayer for the dead] for her. So now, they appointed me to be a makher [big wheel] there [chuckles] I should help out.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Oh.

STONE: So tonight at six o'clock they're having a—a Purim party with Humentashes [filled pastry triangles].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: So I got to be on the committee tonight.

LEVINE: Ah. Well, it sounds like you have an active social life.

STONE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STONE: I like to be with people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: Yeah. So I—I don't—I—I find—I miss her a lot but the life has to go on, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: Do the best you can.

LEVINE: Well, you had a nice long run.

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And that was—

STONE: Yeah. My children - I want -- I'll show you the pictures of my children.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Well, is there anything else you would like to say before we close?

STONE: I want to thank you for interviewing me. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, you're most welcome and my pleasure.

STONE: I enjoyed-

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: I enjoyed remembering. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah, you have a great memory and I want to thank you for a wonderful interview.

STONE: Oh, my pleasure.

LEVINE: And I've been speaking with Nathan Stone-

STONE: Yes.

LEVINE: -who came here at 10 years old from Poland and this-at this time is 91, about to turn 92 next-no, in August. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

EI-1232/STONE