

EI-1252

MOLLY ROTHSTEIN

BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 3, 1923

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 2002 AND JUNE 4, 2003

AGE OF TIME OF INTERVIEW: 79 AND 80

RUNNING TIME: 28:45

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JENNA CIACCIO

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

ARGENTINA

AGE: A FEW DAYS

SHIP: SOUTHERN CROSS

PORT: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

RESIDENCES:

- **US: BROOKLYN, NY; FERNDALE, NY**

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MOLLY ROTHSTEIN WAS BORN ON BOARD SHIP EN ROUTE TO NYC FROM BUENOS AIRES.

LEVINE: I'm very happy today, to be here in the Ellis Island oral history studio with a lady who was born en route to this country. When she was born her name was Munsonia Matla Antzis. Today she is called Molly Rothstein and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. This is a most interesting story and it is one of someone who was born en route to this country. And I'm going

to let her talk mostly about that. If you would start at the beginning please and just say your birth date.

ROTHSTEIN: August 3, 1923

LEVINE: Okay, and where were you born?

ROTHSTEIN: I was born on the high seas, en route to America.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

ROTHSTEIN: It was the Southern Cross, owned by the Munson steamship lines.

LEVINE: Okay, and that was --- it was a merchant marine ship?

ROTHSTEIN: Correct

LEVINE: Which is very unusual to begin with. And where was the ship coming from?

ROTHSTEIN: From Buenos Aires to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Okay, well now if you could fill us in with a little background about your families immigration experience. Maybe, well why don't you start and I'll ask questions.

ROTHSTEIN: Well, my parents fled Russia during the pogrom en route to Paris, hoping to get on a ship coming to America. However the quota was closed and so they took the next available ship, which was going to Buenos Aires, in Argentina.

LEVINE: And, did your family ever tell you anything about life in Russia, or why they left in the precise time that they did?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, because of the pogroms and they wanted to take all the young men, about twenty years, into the service and so they, in the middle of the night, they fled.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, on the papers it's Zeus, but we know him as Isidor, Isidor Antzis.

LEVINE: And, your, he was twenty-six when you were born?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes

LEVINE: And how about your mother, her name.

ROTHSTEIN: Well they have Basha, but we called her Rose Antses.

LEVINE: And her maiden name? Do you know?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, I think it was Sabotte.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

ROTHSTEIN: Phonetically

LEVINE: Okay, S...

ROTHSTEIN: I think it's S-O...

LEVINE: No? You want to write it?

ROTHSTEIN: I think so the way.

LEVINE: Yea, you can use this.

ROTHSTEIN: The way I would spell it, S-A-B-O-T-T-E, Sabotte.

LEVINE: And were your family on, either or both sides, were they, like grandparents, great grandparents, were they Russia, coming from Russia?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Or they were living in Russia?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, right

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay, so the family got to Buenos Aires, and what have you been told about that period?

ROTHSTEIN: Well they had to become citizens, that took two years. And after that, they could get on the quota coming to America, which they did.

LEVINE: And how about life there? Did your father work? What...

ROTHSTEIN: Well, never --- they never really talked about it. That was it. You know.

LEVINE: I assume there was a large Jewish community in Buenos Aires.

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: So, when they were coming, were they coming with anyone else?

ROTHSTEIN: No. They traveled --- they traveled alone.

LEVINE: And you were their first-born child?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, yes

LEVINE: Okay, so what have you been told about your birth and what happened aboard the USMS Southern Cross.

ROTHSTEIN: Well, my parents were in the third class. And about the middle of the voyage, the captain was informed there was a woman in labor. And he said there wasn't any woman on board ship that was pregnant, about to have a baby. And of course he went down, he found out it was so and they took my mother and father up to first class, where I was born.

LEVINE: Okay, and you are donating to the museum what you were wrapped in after your birth. Could you describe that please?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, I think it's a white bedspread, with the emblem of the Munson steamship lines in the center of it

LEVINE: Uh huh.

ROTHSTEIN and that's it.

LEVINE: And it's about the size of, for like a bunk bed kind of uh single bunk bed.

ROTHSTEIN: Or a single bed, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. It's kind of a raised pattern isn't it? It's...

ROTHSTEIN: Uh, yes, yea, yea

LEVINE: It's sort of flowers, I think on the side

ROTHSTEIN: On the side, embossed on the side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. Well, so then they got, the ship arrived in the New York harbor and then what happened?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, before that ---

LEVINE: OK.

ROTHSTEIN: when I was born, the next day there was a party aboard ship. And they had a grand old time, and that, about fifteen minutes – I think –before or after was born, President William Harding had died. And there were two wealthy men playing cards, betting on what the birth would be. And one said if I were a girl, my mother would receive a hundred and twenty dollars. And he'd see that I'd get a free trip to Argentina when I was eighteen, which it never happened. And the other said, if I were a boy, I'd be

named after President William Harding and he'd give her three hundred dollars. Well, my mother and father arrived in America with one hundred and twenty dollars, that's all they had.

LEVINE: Do you know anymore about, did they approach them with this?

ROTHSTEIN: I, no that's all she said, that's all she said. I guess she couldn't understand English, and not everybody spoke, you know, Yiddish, so

LEVINE: Right, Uh-huh, Uh-huh. Wow, so these men do you know anything else about them?

ROTHSTEIN: Nothing, I know nothing else about them. I, not their names, I don't even think my parents really knew. They probably just handed her the money and let her get off the ship.

LEVINE: Wow, Okay. Is there anything else about that passage, that your mother or father have told you?

ROTHSTEIN: Aside from, the [Laughs] party that went on for twenty-four hours, no.

LEVINE: The party was to celebrate your birth?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And people...

ROTHSTEIN: Yea, the entire ship was party time.

LEVINE: Okay, so when the ship came into the New York Harbor, then what happened?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, because they were in first class, they didn't have to go through, you know, Ellis Island or any- any --- they just got off the ship and they arrived that way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ROTHSTEIN: And that's it.

LEVINE: And do you know where they went, when they did come first to New York City?

ROTHSTEIN: They went to, they had an aunt and uncle that lived in the East Side and I can't even remember their names. So they probably had sponsored them to come this country.

LEVINE: So, it might have been the lower east side that you went to first?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, definitely, yea definitely. And then after that we lived --- I think --in Brooklyn,

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ROTHSTEIN: So –

LEVINE So is that where you grew up, in Brooklyn?

ROTHSTEIN: In Brooklyn, and then also up in Ferndale New York.

LEVINE: Oh

ROTHSTEIN: You know, my parents had gotten – had built up a bungalow colony.

LEVINE: So how old were you when you left Brooklyn and, for Ferndale, roughly?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, we would go --- I think about eleven years old. And we would go up there for the summer. Open up for the summer and then go back to New York, so we, you know, continue school. Those years, you can get an apartment, for you know, for the winter.

LEVINE: I see. Now is Ferndale part of the Catskills?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes it is, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. So, can you say anything about what your mother and father's attitudes, or how they, how they felt about the fact of your being born on route to this country and.

ROTHSTEIN: I have a feeling they were very scared [Laughs], because they were in the twenties and not knowing anything, the language or anything --it. I really, I think --- we are four girls. And I think that's -- we've always let them know how proud we were, that they had the, the guts to leave home and to come to a foreign country, two foreign countries actually. Yup.

LEVINE: em-hmm. What about your father's work? Do you know what he did in Russia? What he did in Argentina? What he did here in New York?

ROTHSTEIN: Yea, in Argentina, I understand they were ----- they, whether it was the leather business or they had silver, because I know that when they fled Russia, they had bags of silver. Which they sold along the way as their, you know, passage. I don't know what they did in South America, but when they came to New York, my father went to work in a factory --- the shoes, Buster Brown shoes. Was that a ---- Buster Brown?

LEVINE: Oh, I think so, yea.

ROTHSTEIN: And then he wanted to go into business for himself, and so he went into the produce. He got a pushcart and started working in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: And how about, where in Brooklyn were you? Do you remember?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, as I said, every ----- we used to --- used to have different apartments, in the Flatbush area.

LEVINE: Flatbush, uh-huh. And were you in a community that was largely made up of immigrants? Do you remember that?

ROTHSTEIN: No, I don't think so, no.

LEVINE: How bout school? Remember starting school?

ROTHSTEIN: Yea. I remember going to Winthrop Junior High. I was East Fifty-first Street in Brooklyn. I graduated from Tilden and I did spend one year in the Ferndale school, a two-room schoolhouse. That was very interesting.

LEVINE: Was that your last year?

ROTHSTEIN: No, no. That was the beginning of school, you know, probably around twelve, eleven, twelve, thirteen, something like that.

LEVINE: Oh, so you had the rural schoolhouse, and then you had the big city school.

ROTHSTEIN: Right, yea

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Could you talk a little bit about what summers were like in the bungalow colony in the Catskill Mountains?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh [Laughs]

LEVINE: The things you remember about it when you think about it.

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, I ---- it's --- all I remember is my mother cleaning the bungalows, making them look like little doll houses. And every summer --you know -- the people would come up and spend the two months and go back.

LEVINE: And what kind, who were the people? I mean describe...

ROTHSTEIN: That was ---- I'd say all Jewish people, that came from Brooklyn, Williamsburg, you know stuff like that.

LEVINE: And would there be children?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh yea, yea. They all come. Because those years, there wasn't any air-conditioning. And so everybody would come up, you know Grossinger's, the Concord and that stuff. And then of course it changed.

LEVINE: Now were you close to those big resort areas

ROTHSTEIN: Grossinger's, Swan Lake, you know that's what they called the Borscht Belt.

LEVINE: Right, do you remember, I mean can you say anything about the, there were very historically interesting hotels there. Is there anything that you remember about visiting those big hotels, that were, where the New York City dwellers would go in the summer.

ROTHSTEIN: Well, the biggest and the best hotel at that time was Grossinger's Hotel. And that was a very, very famous hotel. And the others were lots of smaller hotels --- especially around Swan Lake ---- which was beautiful. They had four or five. It was a lovely, lovely place, for families to go with children.

LEVINE: em-hmm, em-hmm. Do you remember any of the entertainers that went to those places?

ROTHSTEIN: I know Grossinger's had all the entertainers. Not that I ever got to see them, you know, but that was the most popular.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how about your mother and father? Do you think they, they adapted well to this country? What was their attitude about America and Americans?

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, they loved being here, they really loved being --- never, hardly ever heard them talk about Russia. Or even Argentina, it was just America.

LEVINE: em-hmm, em-hmm. Do you think, did they become Americanized? In other words did...

ROTHSTEIN: Oh yes. They became -- both became citizens.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and did they speak Yiddish at home? Or did they speak...

ROTHSTEIN: In the beginning, definitely. In fact for me being the first one I had a difficult time at school because all I could speak, at five, was Yiddish. And they sent me home and told my mother, "She can't come back until she speaks English,"

LEVINE: Really?

ROTHSTEIN: Yea, Uh-huh, I guess I learned.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about learning English, how it was for you?

ROTHSTEIN: No, no, nothing at all. Don't remember anything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And as the oldest child with immigrant parents, did you have to kind of act as a go between sometimes?

ROTHSTEIN: Never, never, yea.

LEVINE: em-hmm.

ROTHSTEIN: Not at all.

LEVINE: So, did your father ever talk about life in the factory?

ROTHSTEIN: Never, never.

LEVINE: And how bout your mother, did she have family here besides her husband and her children?

ROTHSTEIN: Uh, just this one aunt and uncle that had sponsored them when they came. And of course they were elderly, so that was it.

LEVINE: Em-hmm, okay well can you say how --- anything about how your birth has had ripple effects in your life? It's so unusual and unique, to have been born, knowing the latitude and longitude of your birth.

ROTHSTEIN: Yes. I really never thought too much about it until recently.

LEVINE: Oh, why do you suppose that's the case?

ROTHSTEIN: I wanted to leave something behind that I thought was very important, mostly for my mother and father. So that I know they're happy about this.

LEVINE: Em-hmm.

ROTHSTEIN: Yup.

LEVINE: Well, I think they'd be very happy that you're being interviewed today and...

ROTHSTEIN: Oh can I just tell one interesting story?

LEVINE: Absolutely.

ROTHSTEIN: When I was eighteen, my girlfriend and I decided to see America. America was Miami Beach, and that was during the war. And so every eight hours, passengers on the boat ---on -- on the, on the, bus had to get off. Service people got on first. And then any civilian could get on. It was about in Raleigh, when this whole -- you know - transaction occurred. And the guys were nice. They let two ladies sit.

And there was a young man standing next to me. And I heard them talking, he said he was a merchant seaman. And I looked up and I said, "Did you ever hear of the Southern Cross?" And he said, "Yes, that was the first ship I was ever on. I was a fireman." I said, "Were you on the ship when a baby was born?" And he said, "Yes, and was I mad. They had a party for twenty four hours, and I couldn't go 'cause I was a fireman." And then I let him know that I was that child. I never got his name. It was just two pashing sh--- two passing ships, you know. And I just realized that whatever my parents did tell me, actually happened. And that's something I'll never forget.

LEVINE: Wow, what a coincidence, huh?

ROTHSTEIN: Em-hmm, yup. Of all the people in the world, to have somebody just standing right, right by you on the bus. And he --- like he was the only other person that I knew that was on that ship when I was born.

LEVINE: Wow.

ROTHSTEIN: So that to me, that was very memorable.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, well, let's see, we have a, we're gonna have enough ----
- I wanna say we're gonna have a number of papers on file, that Molly has brought to us, including the fares, the reduced fares from South America. And you have found your mother and father's names on the website,

ROTHSTEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: on the ships manifest. And you'll be donating the blanket and at some point this wonderful birth certificate to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. And why don't you talk about your unique idea for your tombstone.

ROTHSTEIN: [Laughs] I don't want to, okay. I decided I wanted -- there again, something that when my children went there, they just wouldn't see a tombstone. They'd see something beautiful. And I had my birth certificate engraved on the tombstone, and it's quite beautiful. And it looks exactly like my birth certificate.

LEVINE: And where will that tombstone be?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, it's called the Parksville, which is really --- it's in Parksville, but it's the Ferndale cemetery in Parksville.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, maybe we could speak a little bit about --- you married, you married and had children. Why don't you say your first married name and your children's names?

ROTHSTEIN: All right, I married Louis Goldfarb. I have a son Stephen William Goldfarb and a daughter Deborah Lee Anzeone.

LEVINE: Ok, and do you have grandchildren?

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, I have four grandchildren. Two boys, two girls, em-hmm.

LEVINE: And, how about life for you growing up, did you feel as though you had --- you were an immigrant in growing up, or no?

ROTHSTEIN: No, no, no, never, never

LEVINE: Okay, and just a little bit. When you look back on it -- your family coming here to this country -- do you think that somehow that event had an impact on you, on your personality? In what ways do you think that maybe made a difference in your life?

ROTHSTEIN: It did. Because I hardly spoke, because I was --- I didn't feel that my English was that great when I was in school. I was very quiet, a very quiet person.

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself as a girl growing up?

ROTHSTEIN: Quiet

LEVINE: Shy?

ROTHSTEIN: Shy, very shy. I don't think I spoke ten words in co—in high school. I don't re-- I don't re--- I never went to a prom, I never, but it didn't matter, it didn't matter, that was my life. And I had three sisters, so

LEVINE: uh-huh, do you think the shyness was, was, had to do with the fact that you were, at first, not able to speak the language and were not quite assimilated into this country?

ROTHSTEIN: I don't think so, I just think that's the way growing up was in those years. You were quiet, respectful, and not the way it is now. Now their voices are heard. Then we were obedient, an obedient family. So I --- had nothing to do with my being a first. Maybe, maybe yes it did. But I'm not aware of it. It never troubled me.

LEVINE: Right, ok, could you say anything about your greatest satisfactions in your life?

ROTHSTEIN: My children, my grandchildren, just being here in America. Our freedom here, that's, I think the most important thing.

LEVINE: Do you feel you have a special connection to Ellis Island, how does it feel to be visiting Ellis Island? I know...

ROTHSTEIN: Very special, very special. Well especially knowing what my parents went through. But as I said before, I'm just grateful that we let them know how proud we were, that they could come to America and bring us up here. So, that was real determination.

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else that maybe we haven't covered that you wanna say?

ROTHSTEIN: Well, could I mention my sisters just in case somebody would?

LEVINE: Oh, sure.

ROTHSTEIN: I have a sister Natalie Zolatar, Beverly Callan, and Selma Leling. And those were Rose and Isidor's children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh and how about, how did you get, how did you get the idea of donate, of donating your blanket to us, and your birth certificate. What prompted that?

ROTHSTEIN: When I first visited, this is my second visit to Ellis Island. But when I first walked in, in the beginning --- that entrance, with all the suitcases and everything. I" said, God, I've got something that nobody else has ever seen". And I just wanted to be part --- part of it.

LEVINE: uh-huh, well you are part of it. And it's a most unique position that you hold as part of it. And I wanna thank you so much for coming in.

ROTHSTEIN: Yes, it's been my pleasure.

LEVINE: And for donating these things to Ellis Island. You're unique, you were unique from day one.

ROTHSTEIN: Thank you

LEVINE: Thank you so much

ROTHSTEIN: Thank you I really feel blessed

LEVINE: Okay, I have been speaking with Molly Rothstein, who came here, well, she didn't, no, she's a person who would have come here, had she not, right, had she not been put into first class, as a, as a, based on the fact that she was being born.

ROTHSTEIN: And also I was the first citizen in my family, because I was born on an American ship, with an American flag. And I was a citizen, before my mother and father.

LEVINE: Wow, that wonderful, okay I'm closing this interview with Molly Rothstein, this is Janet Levine, On September 13, 2002 and I'm signing off.

LEVINE: Today is June 4, the year 2003. And Molly Rothstein has come back, because she didn't add something, or didn't say something in our initial interview that we both thought was very important to have on the tape, and she's visiting today with her sister, Beverly Callan, and her grand daughter from California, Nicole Anzeone. And we are in the studio together to make this addition to the tape. Well, Molly, it's good to see you again, and I'm so glad you came back.

ROTHSTEIN: It's my pleasure.

LEVINE: Okay, why don't you say the thing that you, that we, you thought of that we really neglected and that deserves to be on this tape.

ROTHSTEIN: Oh, what I didn't say is the first child born to, on a ship, acquires the name of the ship. Now my parents being Jewish, could not use the Southern Cross. And so I was named after the company, the Munson steamship lines. And that's how I became Munsonia Matla Antzis. And I felt I wanted to add that, because that's the only name like that, I guess in the entire world, ever.

LEVINE: Wow, well that only adds to the unique quality of your interview. Okay, well I think we've said the important thing and Molly's blanket, that she was born with, is now in the Ellis Island collection and it's a very welcome addition to it. Well I wanna thank you again Molly, and if, is there anything else that you would like...

ROTHSTEIN: Well the only thing is that eventually you will get the original birth certificate.

LEVINE: Great, wonderful. Okay this is Janet Levine, signing off for the National Park Service.