

**EI-1302**

**SOLOMON ESTREN**

**BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 29, 1918**

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

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**RESIDENCES: BOGORODOSKY, RUSSIA; BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**

LEVINE: —is December the 5<sup>th</sup>, the year 2003. I'm here in the Upper West Side of Manhattan at the Eighth Street A—Atria [PH]. Astria [PH].

ESTREN: Atria.

LEVINE: Atria. Atria Residences with Dr. Solomon Estren, who came here as a five-year-old in 1923 from Bogodrusk [PH].

ESTREN: Yeah, Bogorusk [PH].

LEVINE: Bogorusk.

ESTREN: No "D."

LEVINE: Bogorusk, Russia. Not too far from Moscow, and left through the port of Cherbourg. And the family, Mis—Dr. Estren and his mother and father settled in Brooklyn. This is—

ESTREN: May I say something? Do you want to know how we got to Cherbourg?

LEVINE: I do. And I'm going to ask you that. Let me just say, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and Pete—

LOMBARDO: Lombardo [PH].

LEVINE: —Lombardo is videotaping for Atria at the same time that I'm audio taping for the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Okay. If you would say for the tape your name when—that would have been on the ship's manifest, and if you would spell it, please?

ESTREN: Solomon—S-O-L-O-M-O-N—Estren—E-S-T-R-E-N.

LEVINE: Okay. And your birth date, you mentioned.

ESTREN: October 29, 1918.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you have memories of your life in Russia before coming to the United States?

ESTREN: It's a strange thing. I remember we lived in a little house, private house or a hut, on an unpaved street. I don't remember anything more about it than that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: But that's all I remember.

LEVINE: Y—you don't have memories of, like, grandparents or your mother and father, any experiences there before—

ESTREN: Well, I remember my mother was there and my father was there and I just don't remember anything else about them. As far as other relatives, I don't remember any at all at that particular point. No.

LEVINE: Okay. Did your mother or father ever tell you why they came to the United States at the time that they did?

ESTREN: My father had a, believe, younger brother who was settled in New York City. And I found out later on that he was a real estate developer/owner, whatever you want to call it, on Eastern Parkway—

LEVINE: Oh.

ESTREN: —in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: There also was a sister, an older sister. She lived in East New York in Brook—I—I think that's in Brooklyn too.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: My father, I am told, was a Hebrew teacher in Russia. My mother, I know, was a midwife in Russia.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And they never discussed why they came, and I never asked at the age of five or anything like that. My inference is that they came because of the urging of his brother. Things were not going well for Russians and for Jews—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: —in the—well, at that time, it was already the socialist sub—sub—Socialist Soviet Republic.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: No, 1917 was the—

LEVINE: Right, right.

ESTREN: —Revolution. 1918.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ESTREN: That's all I can tell you.

LEVINE: Okay. Wow. And what was your father's name?

ESTREN: In American, it's Harry and in Hebrew it was Hirsh [PH]. Just one moment. What's the other one? There's a German [unclear]. Sh—Harry Estren.

LEVINE: Okay. And your mother?

ESTREN: Mother is Fanny—interesting—Chen. C-H-E-N.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, were their families from Russia, going back?

ESTREN: As far as I know, they were from Russia, from—yes, going back as far as you can think, as far as I know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So you had to leave Bogorusk.

ESTREN: Bogorusk.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Bogorusk and travel to Cherbourg, which was quite a—a lengthy journey. Could—do you recall, or were you told anything about that part?

ESTREN: I have spar—spark—occasional recollection of this. I don't know whether I was told that or I remember a particular—except I do know that we went from Moscow, I think, to Riga in Latvia. And I know that because my mother said to me that then I was a kid and I fell down the steps in Riga and I broke my front two teeth. And when we got to the United States we lived on Church Avenue. And without the front two teeth, I could only say "Thirth Avenue."

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ESTREN: That may be why she t—told this to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: But we got to Riga and I don't know how we got from Riga to Cherbourg, as—assume it's probably train.

LEVINE: Probably.

ESTREN: And I do—at least I was told—this is not from memory. I was told that we were on a steamer or s—ship from Cherbourg to the United States.

LEVINE: Okay.

ESTREN: And we came into New York City harbor.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you remember anything of the voyage?

ESTREN: No.

LEVINE: No. Okay, do you remember coming into the New York harbor?

ESTREN: I don't remember coming into the New York harbor.

LEVINE: Okay. And Ellis Island, anyth—

ESTREN: Yeah, it's a strange thing that I should remember anything about Ellis Island. All I can tell you for sure that I remember is some kind of a huge hall in Ellis I—and a building in Ellis Island and some kind of decorations, which I infer was probably around Christmas time.

LEVINE: Oh.

ESTREN: And I don't know anything more than that.

LEVINE: Wow, uh-huh. Do—do you know, or were you told if you were detained? Did you have to stay overnight or anything?

ESTREN: Don't know.

LEVINE: Oh. And how about your uncle? Y—we assume that he sponsored you and your—

ESTREN: [unclear] sponsor. My uncle—it's interesting how I forgot his name—but my uncle sponsored—I assume he picked us up. I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: It's of interest. One of the things I remember as I was growing up, he was very well off and he used to drive a car, which you're too young to remember, called the Pierce Arrow. Did you ever hear of that?

LEVINE: I've heard of it.

ESTREN: Pete?

LOMBARDO: Yeah.

ESTREN: It's a upgraded British car.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And I would assume that he had it because, you know, he was wealthy from what his business was. And I was privileged to ride in it once in a while.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ESTREN: But more that that—Sam was his name.

LEVINE: Sam.

ESTREN: Samuel.

LEVINE: Samuel Estren.

ESTREN: Samuel Estren, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your father's—taught Hebrew in Russia. What did he do when he got to this country?

ESTREN: We lived in Brownsville for a period of time in Brooklyn. And I don't know when, but he began to run a grocery store. And again, I don't know whether it was while we were at Brownsville or when we moved to near Eastern Parkway and Schenectady Avenue, which is now part of Crown Heights, I believe.

LEVINE: Oh.

ESTREN: But he had a grocery store and he and my mother ran a grocery store there, mom and pop store.

LEVINE: We're going to pause for a minute. [tape off/on]—here. So they ran a grocery store. Just to back up a second, when you arrived and left Ellis Island and got to Brooklyn, do you remember any first impressions as a little five-year-old? Or, no? Okay. Do you remember the grocery store?

ESTREN: Yeah, but let me backtrack.

LEVINE: Okay.

ESTREN: I went to school, 156, I think, in Brownsville and isolated things that I recall, native language at home was Russian. And when my parents wanted to talk so I didn't understand, they would talk Yiddish, which I understand—stood. And they told me when I went to school and I couldn't speak English, and I didn't understand enough Yiddish, the kids—this is first grade—called me a wop. Nobody knew what a wop was but the called me a wop. True story. My mother then at some point said I came home and I said, "I'm not going to speak any language until I know English." So I went ahead and I forgot Russian. I did forget Russian.

LEVINE: Wow.

ESTREN: I had to take it up again when I was—at 19 or 20 years of age. And I still know Yiddish, so I began to speak English well, number one. Number two, I probably have report cards from P.S. 156. I remember—very strange what you remember. My teacher was Mrs. Brisk, B-R-I-S-K. My mother says that she told her that I was a very good student but that I talked too much.

LEVINE: [laughs]

ESTREN: And number three, I was a very good student.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: When they got the grocery store, which was on Schenectady Avenue [unclear], we moved to Schenectady Avenue. Remember things, 226 Schenectady Avenue. I transferred to school there, which was 167. And I remember that very well and fondly. I've been back there on occasion.

LEVINE: Well—

ESTREN: It's on [unclear].

LEVINE: Y—could you describe yourself as a—as a—as a first grader? To make a decision like that is—is highly unusual.

ESTREN: No, no. I just don't remember.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: I don't remember anything about the school or where it was. I know where 167 was. By that time, I was probably 10 or 9 or something like that. You know, at that time, they didn't have intermediate schools. An elementary school—

LEVINE: Right.

ESTREN: —and a night school. But, no, I—I don't. And I don't know how much of this was related to me but I don't personally remember it.

LEVINE: Do you remember your personality? Were you outgoing, shy—

ESTREN: I can't describe that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

ESTREN: I think I tended to be quiet.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay. So you went to school and you learned English, I imagine—

ESTREN: Very rapidly.

LEVINE: Yes.

ESTREN: Apparently.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: Kids do.

LEVINE: Yeah, [chuckles] right. And then, so you probably knew English better than your parents or—

ESTREN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —faster than your parents.

ESTREN: Yes, but they spoke very good English, with an accent. And they learned it rapidly. Did they learn it in Russia? I have no idea.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ESTREN: I don't know.

LEVINE: Did they become citizens?

ESTREN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: I'm a citizen on my father's paper.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: I have my own papers but I'm a citizen on his papers.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, it was Brownsville and they later S—Schenectady Avenue. Were—were they, largely, immigrant neighborhoods?

ESTREN: I had the impression Brownsville is mostly Jewish and mostly Jewish immigrants.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And Schenectady Avenue, I think, was also a Jewish area. There was a huge—there still is a huge synagogue on Albany and Eastern Parkway, which I remember very fondly at that particular time. It's interesting. There was also a—an orthodox synagogue in Brooklyn Children's Museum. Do you know Brooklyn? Do you [unclear] know where the Children's Museum is?

LEVINE: I—I know—

ESTREN: There's a—

LEVINE: —vaguely where it is.

ESTREN: —square about, I would say, Marcy and Putnam or something—Putnam, something like that, a square block where there's, among other things, a—an orthodox synagogue that my father used to take me to. And there was also a museum there where I would spend probably Saturdays as a child, where I learned a lot about stamps and about geography and about things like that. And I was just growing up in that area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Is there anything else you can remember about the immigrant neighborhood? Like, do you remember any societies or—

ESTREN: No, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay. So you—

ESTREN: I can show—whether that was Marcy and Putnam. I think maybe that's where Boy's High School was. It's snowing.

LEVINE: Oh, hmm. Okay. So [clears throat] you went through elementary school.

ESTREN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then what about high school?

ESTREN: I went to Boy's High School, which was the best school, high school in the city at that time. I think that was at Marcy and Putnam. [chuckles] [unclear] was at—in what is now Bedford-Stuyvesant. It

was an elite school and you had to be good and intelligent and all that stuff, and I was good and intelligent and all that stuff. And that I remember. I remember fondly because I enjoyed it very much. I remember some of the teachers. Somewhere or other, I must have gotten the idea that I'm going to go to medical school because I took Latin and there's a rumor that you needed Latin to go to medical school. It's only a rumor but I remember taking four years of Latin and all the math that I could find and the—and my vocation is mathematics and the u—some German and the usual things to take in high school, social studies and history and stuff like that—

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: —and enjoyed that very much.

LEVINE: Were—can you say anything about the attitudes or the values that your parents had that they tried to instill in you?

ESTREN: I can't—I don't know how to answer a question—

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: —like that. I think I was brought up and I think they had been brought up and brought—would bring other people. Other people—my cousins—my cousins would be his sister's children, whom I still know, and my uncle didn't have any children by that wife. His wife ultimately died. He got remarried and had one child. No. Honesty and honorableness and, you know, do unto others and stuff like that; you know, where I got that from, I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: I do know that we went to temple and I do know that I went to the Hebrew School, which I hated. [clears throat] And I do know that I had learned chess, and when I began to beat my father at chess (he was a very good chess player) he stopped playing with me. That, incidentally, has come down so that when I played with people and they start—well, my son, my number four son, when he starts beating me I want to stop playing.

LEVINE: [laughs]

ESTREN: That's a true story.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay.

ESTREN: He lives in Texas so I don't have occasion to do that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So you really enjoyed Boys High School.

ESTREN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you—what did you do then when you graduated from there?

ESTREN: Well, I knew I was supposed to go to college and I applied to several colleges. And I have the vague recollection that my fallback college would have been City College. At that time, anybody in the city could go to City College, but I applied to Columbia and NYU and I got a state scholarship, which could be used at any college in the state of New York. But I had an additional scholarship offered by NYU, so I ended up by taking NYU and I went to the Heights University College of Arts and Pure Sciences. Doesn't exist anymore. It was in the Bronx at the time and went there for the four years, from '35 to '39.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: And I did very well.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, great. And how did the Great Depression affect you and your family?

ESTREN: I don't remember it affecting us in any—

LEVINE: Way, okay. So you did very well and that meant you had a choice of—of where to start your residencies, your internships, or whatever.

ESTREN: [unclear] medical school, yes.

LEVINE: S—so what—where did you go then?

ESTREN: Oh, then I went to NYU School of Medicine.

LEVINE: Yeah. And then?

ESTREN: And then internship at Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn; residency in Kings—in medicine, Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn; fellowship in hematology in what—[clears throat] what is now Tufts Medical School in Boston itself. Tufts undergraduate is in Medford.

LEVINE: Right.

ESTREN: But the Boston Dispensary and Pratt Hospital, it was called, and studied there with a couple of mentors who were world famous.

LEVINE: Who were they?

ESTREN: And then—well, the hematologist was William Dandershek [PH], who was also from Russia many years before.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And my other mentor was Sigfried Townhouser [PH], who was from Germany.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: He was a Jew who converted to Catholicism but he was never baptized. He was—now, I remember things.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Yeah, good.

ESTREN: Things like that, and they were both very—very well known.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you had heroes, in a sense, people to look up to and—

ESTREN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —learn from.

ESTREN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about the buildup to World War II and World War II itself? How did that—did that have an immediate effect personally or on your family or—

ESTREN: I had a—a medical problem [clears throat] which kept me out of the Army [clears throat]—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: —active duty at the time. I was born with a—a cyst. It's called a branchial—B-R-A-N-C-H-I-A-L—cyst here, which kept draining. And at the age of 18 I was operated on by a top surgeon, who did not—was unable to eliminate this particular thing. So I needed another operation a couple of years later. When the war broke out, we were

in our either second or third year of medical school (I forget what), and we were all semi-automatically in the Reserve, the Army Reserve, put into it. When it came time to go into the Army and they asked if I had any medical problems, I said, "Yes, I have a—a branchial sinus, it's called, an opening to the outside, which still continues to bother me." The Army person who took the information promptly had me take a—a—I'll never forget, the sinus x-rays, which had nothing to do with it, but when it came to getting into the active duty they would not accept me (it would be 4F, I guess), because this thing kept draining there. So I remained in the Reserve without being on active duty during the Second World War.

LEVINE: I see.

ESTREN: Now, during that time, having come out of training up in Boston, I came back to New York City and b—became affiliated with Mount Sinai Medical—there was no medical school—Mount Sinai Hospital and Medical Center at the time, where I've been all—from 1947 on for the next 55 years, actually. When the Korean War was on and I was still in the Army Reserve, they gave me a choice. "You can be drafted as a private or you can come in if you volunteer as a lieutenant." So I volunteered as a lieutenant.

LEVINE: [chuckles] And—

ESTREN: This time, there was no problem and I served two years in the Army during the Korean War.

LEVINE: A—as a physician or—

ESTREN: As a physician.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And during the Reserve—

ESTREN: Your question had to do with the Second World War. It didn't affect me in any particular way at that point.

LEVINE: In the Reserve, did you do anything related—

ESTREN: No.

LEVINE: —to the war?

ESTREN: No.

LEVINE: No. Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: No.

LEVINE: I see.

ESTREN: What I did is just, you know, "Why did you become a hematologist?" You know what a hematologist is? Blood specialist.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, right.

ESTREN: And, you know, I've been asked that so many times. I look back. I was an intern and a resident, that my friends were all in the Army. I kept getting letters from France and God knows where else, and people getting killed and injured and stuff like that. Here I am. The only attending doctor whom I had at the Brook—at Kings County and my residency who made any sense to me happened to be a hematologist. Now, maybe that's why I went into hematology.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

ESTREN: But otherwise, there was no effect from the war on me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: Then six years later or whatever it was, when I had to go into the Army and bitched like hell, "They didn't take me. Why do they take me now?" Couldn't get out of it so I did go in. It was all right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: Stationed in Germany for a year and a half.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, when you say that this one position was the only one that made sense to you, wh—what do you mean? As far as hi—his—

ESTREN: He was a very good teacher.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: Now, that's essentially what it is. The subject happened to be hematology.

LEVINE: I see.

ESTREN: And I'm making it up because I don't know; if he happened to be a surgeon, would I have become a surgeon? I doubt it. But it was an interesting part—I've always been interested in internal, which is diagnostic medicine. And hematology fits in very well in that.

LEVINE: I see.

ESTREN: Have been a—I think people will agree—a very good training and very good experience in medicine and hematology.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ESTREN: And if you want to know about Sinai, I began there in 1947 and had to resign because of illness—not resign, retire in—in 2002.

LEVINE: Wow.

ESTREN: Last year. But I'm still on the staff. I'm clinical professor of medicine at the medical school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, when did you meet your wife and how did you meet your wife?

ESTREN: We lived in Brooklyn. At that time, my family and I lived on Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn and summers, I found myself spending summers at Manhattan Beach. Do you know Brooklyn? There's a—at the—

LEVINE: [unclear].

ESTREN: —Coney Island area there's a little bit more upscale. There's Brighton Beach and upscaled from that is Manhattan Beach. So we used to go to Manhattan Beach where there was a Big Band area. Tommy Dorsey and all those people came every week, I suppose it was, and it was wonderful. And there were a whole bunch of young people, and I was in school, probably in undergraduate school at the time. And one of the people I met was this beautiful young lady, who ultimately—we started going around, ultimately got married, as soon as 1943, as soon as I got out of medical school, I think it was. You don't know it but she died in an automobile accident.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: 1986.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: [unclear] driving. And we have—we have four boys and one girl.

LEVINE: Oh. What was your wife's name and her maiden name?

ESTREN: Elaine's name was Elaine Schwartz.

LEVINE: Schwartz. And your children?

ESTREN: Mark James is number one. Richard Scott is number two. Robert Keith is number three. Jonathan Brent is number four and Elizabeth Jane, Gilbert now, is number five.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Oh, and do you have grandchildren as well?

ESTREN: Yeah.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ESTREN: I have seven grandchildren.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful.

ESTREN: Incidentally, Liz went to Ellis Island with her kids [clears throat] and looked for our name. And I think she said she couldn't find it; I'm not sure.

LEVINE: Oh.

ESTREN: Now, I understand there's a listing. You can buy your name into a listing.

LEVINE: To the Wall of Honor.

ESTREN: And I don't know whether she did that or not.

LEVINE: Well, I can check that for you.

ESTREN: If you could, good.

LEVINE: Sure.

ESTREN: Because I—no, I haven't been there. I—I have a [unclear]—I don't know. Where do you live? May I ask?

LEVINE: Lower Manhattan.

ESTREN: All right. I have a problem. My office used to be two blocks from the Metropolitan Museum in the E—Upper East Side. I was there for four years. [clears throat] Yeah. I've been to the Jewish Museum. I've been to the Guggenheim Museum. I've been to the Prado in Spain. I've been to the museums all over [chuckles] the world, all over the world. And I rarely go to the Metropolitan Museum. I could always go there. Same thing there with Hawaii. Never went to Hawaii because you can always go there. You know, that sort of thing there. So the problem is that Ellis Island is so close, I could always go there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: I just haven't been there. One of my favorite young ladies is a patient, a retired lady, Florence Grossman [PH], acts as a docent at—at the Holocaust, I think—not on Ellis Island. The Holocaust—

LEVINE: Right.

ESTREN: I haven't been there either. She says, "Why don't you come down? I'll take you around."

LEVINE: Okay. Well, you—I hope you make a visit to Ellis Island.

ESTREN: Gotta do that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: Got to do that.

LEVINE: Well, what do you feel most proud of that you've done in your life?

ESTREN: I don't know whether I can answer that. I'm—I'm reputed to be a very good internist hematologist and had a very good medical experience.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And people are proud of me for having done that, seriously.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ESTREN: We had a party last week. How old am I?

LEVINE: How old are you? 19—85?

ESTREN: Yeah. We had a [unclear] surprise party for family. I had had one when I was 80 and had one when I was 75, so they decided to have one when I was 85. And we had almost the whole family, including the—a nephew from Seattle, a friend from Dallas and a nephew from—

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: —Guatemala and his family and a bunch of people locally, and maybe a half dozen patients. Now, I'm answering your question. Now, to my utter surprise, one of the patients, a young lady who is now 40 who had triplets, having had a serious blood illness 40 year—20 years before, which I carried her through, made a little speech and donated support for a plaque in Hematology at Sinai—

LEVINE: Oh.

ESTREN: —in my name.

LEVINE: Oh, that's beautiful.

ESTREN: So I think they were proud of me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Wonderful. Wonderful.

ESTREN: Very, very touched.

LEVINE: You've—yes. That's lovely.

ESTREN: So I don't know. You have to ask somebody else.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay. You're not a press agent for yourself. I see. Okay. Do you think coming here as a—as a five-year-old and just the fact of—of changing countries and cultures, do you think that impacted you and sort of your—the way you approached life or your ideas of things?

ESTREN: I don't—I can't—you know, logically, I can't answer that question, except to say that I was five years of age. How the hell do I know what the culture was there or here?

LEVINE: I see.

ESTREN: I've been back to Russia at least three times.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

ESTREN: Whether I recognized anything—I speak enough Russian so that I can—if I say somebody [unclear] say, they give me a long sentence which I can't understand after that, not enough to be able to talk fluently with them anymore. I know a lot of the history and I would not like to be living under the SSR, or even currently. I have a former worker who—whose family is in Belarus. She's here. She can't stand Belarus; neither can her family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: So I can only say that I don't know anything about the—didn't know anything about the culture there and I think that I was fortunate and my parents were fortunate to be able to get out of there and to come to the United States. They had a rough time. I worked in the grocery store when I was a kid.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: You know, and realize now how difficult it must have been for them—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: —at that time.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: And—and all they wanted, their only son to become a doctor.  
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles] Well, I'm sure you made them proud.

ESTREN: You must have heard that before.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ESTREN: You must have heard that before.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else before we close? Is there anything else you can think of about coming to this country, your life here, your mother and father, their life here, a—anything further that you might want to add?

ESTREN: You'll have to ask me questions. I don't think so. I think we're fortunate to be here. I think that you can't say anything for or against anything at all, except that I did—I don't know about other people. I'm sure that I didn't appreciate a lot of the things for many, many years but it's been a good thing most of the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

ESTREN: Family's been superb.

LEVINE: Hmm.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Just as a last question that I've been asking, wh—when 9/11 happened, could you say anything about your reaction, response or how you're thinking about that?

ESTREN: Yeah. Yeah. I was at Mount Sinai making morning rounds. Mount Sinai is at Fifth Avenue and, let's say, 100<sup>th</sup> Street. And I came down, having seen a few patients, my patients in the hospital. And as I walked out, the doorman said to me, "You know, an airplane hit the"—

LEVINE: Trade Towers.

ESTREN: —"towers, one of the towers." We both thought of "King Kong," of course. I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah." I got into the car and I drove down to my office, which was at 87<sup>th</sup> Street and got out of the car at that point and the doorman said to me and—"Did you hear about that? An airplane hit one tower; another one hit the other tower." In the meantime, you could look down Fifth Avenue from 87<sup>th</sup> Street where I was as far south as you could, and later on we realized there was smoke coming up. I don't remember seeing it at that point. And within 10 or 15 minutes of the time I got to the office—it was 10 to 9 when I left Sinai and it was, let's say, a quarter after 9—when the second plane hit, I am told that—about 10 to 10 or something of that nature.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: There were ambulances and fire engines speeding like hell down Fifth Avenue. Unbelievable.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And, number one, and we listened to the radio and we heard what had happened. Number two, all the patients cancelled. All the patients I had coming in that particular day, or almost all. Maybe one showed up, or two. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: But I know that—those thing—and the—we were—we were all horrified. It's not believable.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ESTREN: Just not believable. Number three, we went outside many times. That was September. I think it wasn't raining or snowing. It was a good day, went outside—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: —to look and all we could see was that Fifth Avenue, which is a madhouse normally, had practically nothing, the usual traffic plus a lot of emergency vehicles (it's one way going south)—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: —going south as far as you could and something going on way down on the TV. We could see that—we could now see that that was smoke there. That was a—I believe it was a Thursday. Am I wrong?

MAN: Tuesday.

ESTREN: I don't know. Whatever the day was—

LEVINE: The day, uh-hmm.

ESTREN: —my office—all the offices in the hospital, they were all disasters for the next couple of days. People didn't show up. Things didn't work, so on. We had very little activity at Sinai. They had a lot of activity at NYU and at Bellevue. NYU down—what's called downtown hospital was near enough to the—a lot of people who got injured were taken to those hospitals, also New York Hospital had a lot. Very, very few came to Sinai. Of course, I called Sinai, found out if I could help and they say, "No, you know, we're all right over here. Don't worry about that part."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: And I—you know, what happened the next few d—I don't remember, except were absolutely devastated.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ESTREN: Absolutely devastated.

LEVINE: Yeah. I guess, unfortunately, more people died than were hurt, as far as needing medical attention.

ESTREN: There were 3,000 people who were killed, or 2,800—

LEVINE: Right.

ESTREN: —who were killed. And a small number are lucky enough to get to New York Hospital, which is a huge emergency and burn service, and New York Down—Downtown—

LEVINE: Down—

ESTREN: —Hospital—it's got another name now, which I don't know much about, but they affiliated with NYU—it's good there. And some of them were all right but a lot of people, no. Terrible.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: Just terrible.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ESTREN: And then everything, as you probably know, was cordoned off from that minute. You couldn't get into the Mount Sinai Hospital, except with one entrance on Madison Avenue.

LEVINE: Right.

ESTREN: And I think one entrance on 102—on 100<sup>th</sup> Street or something like that. Same thing was true for the other places. All right.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview.

ESTREN: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: And I've been speaking with Dr. Solomon Estren, who came at five years old in 1923 from Russia and has contributed to this country since he has been here. And this is Janet Levine signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]