

**EI-1322ISENBERG**

**BECKY GOLDBERG ISENBERG**

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

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

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**RUSSIA, 1914**

**AGE: 16**

**SHIP:**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES: LIVERSHAY (NEAR PINSK), RUSSIA; BROOKLYN TO QUEENS, NYC**

LEVINE: Today is May the fourth, the year 2004. And I'm here in Long Beach, Long Island, New York. I'm here with Becky Isenberg, who came through Ellis Island by herself from a little shtetl near Pinsk.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: And she was 16 years old in 1914—

ISENBERG: [chuckles]

LEVINE: —when she [chuckles]—when she arrived here. And, okay, now, I'm—I'm going to ask you questions. Whatever you remember, that'll be good. Okay?

ISENBERG: All right.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Now, you said you didn't remember your exact birth date. But you were born in 18—no—

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: 1898.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: I guess. 1898.

ISENBERG: Sure.

LEVINE: And [clears throat] tell me a little bit about your life before you came to America, when you were in the shtetl.

ISENBERG: Did I what?

LEVINE: You tell me a little bit about your life before you came to America.

ISENBERG: Ya—I came to America—

LEVINE: In the—no, in the Old Country.

ISENBERG: Country. In my country?

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh. Wh—what—who was in your family? Your mother? Your father?

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have sisters and brothers?

ISENBERG: I have four si—I have four sisters in the family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

ISENBERG: So I was the second one when the other one—

LEVINE: Okay.

ISENBERG: —that I came with somebody from the country, from my little country to the boat. And they took me. They—they both was two weeks, one in, you know—

LEVINE: Two weeks, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —c—the country we [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: Yeah, that's an [unclear]. I came to Castle Garden. It's [several words unclear] little house. A lot of people who know [several words unclear], they used to come there. And they—the people from here was—the family used to take them over. They're responsible for them, to be responsi—so to me, my father's brother and [unclear] daughter came in that Castle Garden. And they—they took me over, that they gonna take care of me. So I was with my [unclear], people there already very, well, [unclear] people. You know, Jewish.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And w—I was made there [several words unclear] when I came.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, well, first, let's go back to your life before you came.

ISENBERG: Before I came?

LEVINE: Did you go to school before you ever came to this country? Did you go to school—

ISENBERG: There was no—

LEVINE: —in your—

ISENBERG: —school.

LEVINE: There was no school. [chuckles]

ISENBERG: And there was no doctors there. There was nothing there. One—not even a doctor or a—you call that like here a—a druggist man.

LEVINE: Yeah, like a pharmacist.

ISENBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: A druggist.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And he was the one that told you what to take if you were sick.

ISENBERG: Take—that's it. And I came to this country and I start [unclear] and I had a—a mother, that she was a very sick woman all the way. I was the second one from the place, a sister and then two sisters, you know—

LEVINE: Younger, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —after me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was your father's name?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

ISENBERG: My father was N—Noham [PH] in Jewish and Nathan in English.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was your mother's name?

ISENBERG: Anna.

LEVINE: And—

ISENBERG: Hannah [PH]—Hannah.

LEVINE: Hannah. And what was her maiden name?

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: You know her name before she married your father, what she had for a maiden name?

ISENBERG: I don't—

LEVINE: No?

ISENBERG: When she got married—when she got married to my father, I—

LEVINE: You weren't around. I know. [laughs] But do you remember—do you remember the—her name before she got married? Her last name?

ISENBERG: Wait a minute. What are you asking now?

LEVINE: I'm asking—your mother—

ISENBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: Her name was Hannah. Before she married your father, what was her last name?

ISENBERG: I don't know.

LEVINE: You don't know. Okay. And what was your maiden name? What was your father's last name?

ISENBERG: My father's? My mother's first name? My father's first name?

LEVINE: Their last name, the second name.

ISENBERG: The last name?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I—in there, they—in Jewish, is Bakonchuk [PH]. It was a—their name, the second name in—in—in the little town was Bakonchuk. And when my father's brother came here—he's the only one, the first one, so he made [unclear] Norman Goldberg.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

ISENBERG: He changed the name right away to Goldberg. So everybody—the family was called Goldberg.

LEVINE: Goldberg, okay.

ISENBERG: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So when you—when you first came to this country—

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: —you were called Becky Goldberg.

ISENBERG: I—I g—yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I had to go—

LEVINE: By your father—

ISENBERG: Because nobody—I had to go from there. Nobody I had, except my own decision.

LEVINE: Now, tell me—

ISENBERG: See, he came before.

LEVINE: Oh. Who came first?

ISENBERG: Who came first? My older sister.

LEVINE: Okay.

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: Now—

ISENBERG: She was [unclear] two years older than me.

LEVINE: Okay. What was her name?

ISENBERG: Her name was Lena.

LEVINE: Lena.

ISENBERG: Leah. [PH]

LEVINE: Leah. [laughter] When Leah came here, why did Leah come?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Why—why did Leah come to America?

ISENBERG: Why they came to—

LEVINE: Why did Leah leave the shtetl and come to America?

ISENBERG: To come to where?

LEVINE: Leah came here first.

ISENBERG: Who take me first?

LEVINE: No. Your sister, Leah.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: She was the one who came to this country—

ISENBERG: Right.

LEVINE: The first one.

ISENBERG: Right.

LEVINE: Why did she come?

ISENBERG: Why did she come?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Because she—they didn't want to—my father was in—in 1916 in this country and he was two years here, and then he went back. And he sees that he's got to go back because they can't make a living in the small country.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: Did I make sense?

LEVINE: Yes, it does. So he came here so he could make a better living.

ISENBERG: That's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

ISENBERG: And I came here and he—and I came, my older sister [unclear] also. [unclear] his brother, my father's brother—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —took the other one. And then I took a ticket when I [several words unclear]. Every week, a dollar that we should come to this country. And I paid—I—I paid \$5 a week. I—I—I used to get \$5 a week.

LEVINE: A week. Well, how—

ISENBERG: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Wow. [chuckles] That's great. Now, tell me first, how much did it cost you to come to this country?

ISENBERG: I don't know.

LEVINE: No. Okay. Now, what—

ISENBERG: I don't know how much it cost.

LEVINE: Did you have any idea what this country would be like when you came?

ISENBERG: No. I was a very good looking—not bad looking w—girl—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —[several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. [chuckles]

ISENBERG: And I [unclear] 130 pounds [unclear]. And that didn't mean anything to me because I didn't know anything too much. In that little town, we didn't know much.

LEVINE: Tell me about—

ISENBERG: We didn't have—we didn't have too much education. Nothing.

LEVINE: Tell me more about the little town. What else do you remember about the little town where you—where you grew up.

ISENBERG: When I grow up?

LEVINE: Wh—when you were in that little town where you didn't go to school and there wasn't much, what was the town like?

ISENBERG: I couldn't go—anything and the—they didn't ask you [unclear] school. I'd go right into work for \$5 a week.

LEVINE: Well, that was here.

ISENBERG: I went here.

LEVINE: Yeah. But let's just wait. Let's first talk about life before you came. Before.

ISENBERG: Before I came?

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

ISENBERG: I learned how to work with dresses in the—my little town. There was one that shows you—

LEVINE: How to sew.

ISENBERG: —how—had an idea about dresses making.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And I came here and they asked you in Castle Garden, “What [unclear]?” I says, “I [unclear].” You know. [laughter]

LEVINE: Yeah. You did—

ISENBERG: I did something.

LEVINE: That’s what you were. Okay. So—

ISENBERG: I could write a book for my life—

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: —but I can’t now.

LEVINE: Well, instead of writing the book, you tell me everything you can remember before. What did you do in that little town besides learn to sew? What did you do?

ISENBERG: I [unclear]. I—I [unclear] know what—

LEVINE: When you were in this little town—

ISENBERG: Little town.

LEVINE: Yeah, in the little t—

ISENBERG: What did I learn?

LEVINE: Yeah. What did you do?

ISENBERG: Nothing. Nothing, [unclear] except a woman used to learn how to daven.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: So I used to go, like a—they used to go—rabbitz [PH]. But I mean, like here, a teacher.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: But when I came here, I didn't have a chance to go to school. There was [unclear] schools to make.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So my mother was a sick woman.

LEVINE: Oh. Was your mother sick when you—when you were over in your little town too before she came?

ISENBERG: Sure. Then they came in July. Then I couldn't go—be without them because I was well attached to my mother or brother. So they were still in the Old Country and I was here—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your sister.

ISENBERG: —in this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So I also took, for a dollar a ticket a week and I took—when they came—just six months after they came here, the war broke out, the First War.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: [unclear] at them. I says, "I can't be with my mother and father. I've got to have my family." My older sister wasn't so kind, you know. But one of them, they got to having a family—that should be more attached to the family. See?

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Like you like one of the family better than the other. So that does not happen?

LEVINE: Yes, it does.

ISENBERG: That's it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: So I—I couldn't be without my mother but I could be with my—with my—[unclear] with my uncle, because they were very [unclear] and they couldn't do it. So I just stayed with them and saved a dollar. I used to g—give them once \$5 and then I used to b—I [unclear] in July. And in August, I think they must have broke out the war, so was thanking God.

LEVINE: Yes.

ISENBERG: You see? Otherwise, I wouldn't have nobody. But I had my three sisters and my father and mother. And then we had family—started coming in more and more. And that's how I am here, an old lady.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Well, tell me. How did you make the money to send them? What did you do?

ISENBERG: We—

LEVINE: Did you sew?

ISENBERG: I sew—I s—first, I sew men's shirts.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So I had \$5 a week. And I thought that somebody used to come and see who is working here? Saw me. They didn't say nothing because I was a nice girl, you know. And I was in [unclear]. I used to work, that time.

LEVINE: Did you work in a big place with a lot of people?

ISENBERG: And then after I started and getting a little bit more friendly with people to find out what to do and how to do [several words unclear] my mother came here. I was very happy.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I took the [several words unclear], you know, in [unclear], if you know where—

LEVINE: Say it again.

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Y—you took—

ISENBERG: Yeah. No, that is—they changed their names. There wasn't even a car here that everybody should have. There were horse and wagon—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —to go to the train.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: They haven't got a travel [unclear], a nickel to go to all day to change—for transfers.

LEVINE: Transfers. [chuckles] Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: You see, for a nickel they used to run around all day.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: You know?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Like, day to night. I says, "No wonder people like to live here [unclear] so much." There were everything. You [unclear] you could get. Well, we [unclear] a car. Two people took two cars in a h—in a home now.

LEVINE: Yes.

ISENBERG: We didn't have even in a hundred.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ISENBERG: In a hundred people, we didn't have a car.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I had to—then—and then—then I was here already. And—and—and the people what was [unclear] but here they came to this country, said the man that I married was a landsman to me.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: Because I didn't know—when I came, I didn't know that he is here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So he came and he didn't have a home to stay. So he went to Hartford to a family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: They had their family from his mother's side.

LEVINE: Did you know him in the Old Country?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you know him?

ISENBERG: I knowed him because—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —we live together.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: Everybody, they came—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —and they live together in the country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And then [unclear] but then again he came here and I didn't know it where he is, that fellow, very nice, quiet. And he used to—in the Russian schools—in school, you go in a big town, a big country. In my country, I didn't have anything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: It was too young.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: So he came and he went to the Army. He was five years in the Army here and I didn't know it.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: See?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you—then you met him again when he came out of the Army?

ISENBERG: Again, I met him after he got done. My mother was here. So used to, in Brooklyn, have a Meyer [PH] Street—have a Meyer Street that used to sell things, you know, like all people—all things in a pushcart.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Yeah, [unclear] thing. So he came from the coun—the Army. He didn't have too many friends, too many people, too many family. So he took up pushcarts and he started selling and I didn't know it. My mother went in that street to buy something, because there was [unclear]. And she saw him. She saw him. He says, "[unclear]?" "Yeah." Just like that. [sentence unclear]. Yeah. He's [unclear] like you'd see heaven.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: An angel. [speaking in foreign language]. Do you understand Jewish?

LEVINE: I—I get the drift of it but I don't used every word. Go ahead.

ISENBERG: You don't understand?

LEVINE: No. But it's better if you speak in English for this.

ISENBERG: In English.

LEVINE: Okay.

ISENBERG: I will.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

ISENBERG: I'll try.

LEVINE: Okay.

ISENBERG: I didn't go to school too much.

LEVINE: I'm sure you can speak English.

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: My father wanted to marry for me somebody but I couldn't. [voice breaking]

LEVINE: Ah.

ISENBERG: Because my mother was a sick woman.

LEVINE: So you had to—

ISENBERG: I had to be home. [voice breaking]

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: Oh, [unclear]. I have to sew [unclear] and cook [unclear]. [voice breaking]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: She say, "You should do the housework." [crying] My younger sister, the youngster, she's dead already. My older one is dead. Three's dead.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you were a good daughter.

ISENBERG: [crying]

LEVINE: And you did what you had to do. Yeah. So—so—but you went to work too. Right? You went to work besides taking care of the house.

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

ISENBERG: No. They—they started going to work and come [unclear] housework. My father got to [unclear]. He had to eat. We used to keep the house beautifully.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: So tell me about—so then your husband came out of the Army. He had a pushcart—

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: —in your neighborhood.

ISENBERG: And we started coming [unclear] to me in my house, my fa—my mother's house [unclear].

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And then we started thinking that he likes me and he would like to marry me.

LEVINE: Well, what about you? Did—did you like him too?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you like him?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Did you like him?

ISENBERG: I don't know.

LEVINE: You don't know?

ISENBERG: I [several words unclear] need me.

LEVINE: Mmm, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: He was very nice but he wasn't my type.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles] Why wasn't he your type?

ISENBERG: Because I realized that I [unclear] what I like, he didn't like much. [laughter]

LEVINE: What did you like? What did you like when you were a young—

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: —a young woman?

ISENBERG: He never [unclear]. What's the difference? Forget about it. It's over.

LEVINE: It's over. [chuckles] Okay.

ISENBERG: Now it's over. Anything else that you want to know.

LEVINE: Yeah. [chuckles]

ISENBERG: Important, and I remember—

LEVINE: Okay. Okay.

ISENBERG: —my son is very proud of me. Thank God.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And then I had a son with him only, and I couldn't have anymore.

LEVINE: Ah.

ISENBERG: Because I was [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Then I started m—my time what you get, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I started getting when I was 30 years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: You know, trouble—always trouble [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah. Tell me what—tell me what you're proud of. What makes you feel proud?

ISENBERG: [several words unclear] life.

LEVINE: Tell me.

ISENBERG: [sentence unclear]. I love people more than myself.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I love people.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: And I love to give them pleasure.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful.

ISENBERG: I was the only one in the family in the four sisters that I have the kind of way—character in me. I was born like that. I don't know. I couldn't help it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And they—up till this day, whatever my son [unclear], and then I got married and it took me two years till I got him, because I couldn't have no children. Maybe it's his side or my side. Didn't have too much of—very good to me. Very nice. He's a—was a wonderful man. And he was educated more than I am.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: That's [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Well, that's why you came to this country.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you could have a better life, right, for your family?

ISENBERG: Yeah, that's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And thank God. We lived about 50 years together or more.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: What is my life now? I thank God I got a good son, a wonderful family. He—he [unclear] in the Army two years too. So my husband gave away five years. My son gave away two years for this country in the Army.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Can't have anything bad [unclear].

LEVINE: No, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I never had the [unclear] thing that [several words unclear] the law. Never had any trouble. Maybe [unclear] my family.

LEVINE: Good.

ISENBERG: Never got—but we rented the place [unclear] everything.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: Never had an argument. I never had an argument. Too much [unclear]. I didn't like the people; I didn't talk to them. That's it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: And my son is very proud of me; thank God. And I'm proud of my son. He's the one that—he—he was married with a wonderful girl. And [unclear] a second time. Then they [unclear]—he felt—he felt that he can't live any more with her, so he divorced her. You know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: He had three children with her and now I have a beautiful [unclear]. I have grandchildren and great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And I sit and wait now for the rest of my life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: What else can I do? He died maybe about 10 or 11 years ago.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I give [unclear] a beautiful home. I had a nice four-room apartment.

LEVINE: Well, tell me. When you first came to this country, you went where?  
To Brooklyn?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: Where did you settle when you came to America?

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where did you go? Where did you live?

ISENBERG: Where did I live?

LEVINE: Mmm.

ISENBERG: I—I live when I was married.

LEVINE: No, when you first came. When you were 16 years old. [pause] Did  
you go to Brooklyn?

ISENBERG: Go where?

LEVINE: Brooklyn or Queens?

ISENBERG: Working?

LEVINE: No. Where you went to live.

ISENBERG: I went—I went to work.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Sure.

LEVINE: But were you in Queens or were you in Brooklyn? Or you—where did  
you go?

ISENBERG: Where did I go?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Where could I go?

LEVINE: Yeah. Where did you go to live?

ISENBERG: To live?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Myself?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Already married.

LEVINE: Wait. Just a second. Wait. We're going to pause here. [clears throat] [tape off/on]

ISENBERG: I talked to him.

LEVINE: Okay. Wait just a second.

ISENBERG: [several words unclear] and now, it's just like [unclear] again. You sit and you wait for the time comes to go in heaven. That's it.

LEVINE: That's how you—

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Oh, nobody misses—right?

LEVINE: Well, I don't know about that. I think people are missed.

ISENBERG: Yeah. Everybody dies. It comes a time when the God is—is calling.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MAN: Hi, how are you?

LEVINE: Hello. Okay. We're going to pause for family because [tape off/on]—

ISENBERG: What I went to in life [crying] [unclear].

LEVINE: When you think about the good parts of your life—when you think about the high points of your life—

ISENBERG: That's [unclear].

LEVINE: What do you think about then?

ISENBERG: [unclear] I [unclear] the best thing. I couldn't do anything in my house, to cook for myself. I took a woman. I couldn't take it. I said, "The best thing's, I have a [unclear]." And they gave me—recommend that I should go in here, and I like it.

LEVINE: You like it here. Good.

ISENBERG: Is very nice people here, very nice meals. [several words unclear] good things.

LEVINE: That's right.

ISENBERG: Yeah, even in the home [unclear] yourself, you cook sometimes, is natural. Here is the same thing, doing anything that you like or you wanted. And that's—I [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: And I never have anything [unclear]. Nothing, nothing—nothing [unclear] or anything. I do what I can and I listen to them. But I go on [unclear]. [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Well—

ISENBERG: I'm all—I—let's face it. You got to face it. But you and the [several words unclear]. Don't you think so?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, wait a second. Wait a second.

ISENBERG: I can't complain [unclear] [tape off/on]—

LEVINE: Let me ask you—

ISENBERG: It is.

LEVINE: It is very interesting. Tell me h—why do you think you've lived to such a—

ISENBERG: Do you—do you have a lot of people like that, that they tell you the truth?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: How is it looking through my—

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Is it all right?

LEVINE: Yes. Yours is wonderful. You're telling a good story.

ISENBERG: Yeah—

LEVINE: You're telling it very well. Thank you.

ISENBERG: I have [unclear]. That's what I have.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I can't talk.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay.

ISENBERG: Very tired.

LEVINE: You're tired now?

ISENBERG: I get tired.

LEVINE: You want to take a little rest?

ISENBERG: Mmm.

LEVINE: No?

ISENBERG: Finish it out as much as you can.

LEVINE: Okay, okay. W—two—

ISENBERG: Whatever you're going to do, my dear, do it.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ISENBERG: I love you. You're a darling.

LEVINE: [laughs] Oh, thank you.

ISENBERG: You're a darling.

LEVINE: Thank you. Well, t—you're adorable.

ISENBERG: Thank you, dear. [unclear]—

LEVINE: Yeah. Well—

ISENBERG: My teeth—I have no teeth.

LEVINE: Oh, well.

ISENBERG: It looks terrible.

LEVINE: No, it doesn't.

ISENBERG: No?

LEVINE: No, it doesn't.

ISENBERG: Yet, they say that I'm—I don't look so bad though.

LEVINE: You look fine to me. You look good. Tell me—tell me, why do you think you've lived such a—

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: —long, long life?

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: How come you lived so long?

ISENBERG: I took care—I took care of my body a lot.

LEVINE: You did?

ISENBERG: I [unclear] take care [unclear]. I got massages.

LEVINE: Ah.

ISENBERG: I tried everything to be strong. Yeah. And I built up my body so good that I could stand so long. People [unclear] in here don't know nothing much about the body. I built up my son too good. I [unclear], thank God. He hasn't got no sickness and he—he's a wonderful, good-looking guy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Nice man, quiet, respectable. He have respect for everybody and a lot of them respect for him. And I hope [unclear] respect [unclear] in the 70s already.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And he is working yet.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Good.

ISENBERG: Thank God. I don't see him often because he's in California.

LEVINE: I know.

ISENBERG: I can't see him. He's too busy. His young one has got his [unclear]. I says, "Son, this is your life is [unclear]."

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What did you try to give to your children? What was it you tried to give to your children?

ISENBERG: How did I—

LEVINE: What did you want to give to your children?

ISENBERG: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So my husband—we used to live together till he got married. He got married. He lives with his wife with the children. And they live—and he's got—so on his—[unclear] 30 years on the job, and they let him go.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ISENBERG: Thank God. I says, "Then when you got your brains in [unclear] work." Once you work, you lose everything. When I stopped my job, [chuckles] cooking and bake, whatever, I says, "I'm through with my life. I can't do it now." So that's it. That's the [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [chuckles] Tell me—tell me—

ISENBERG: I miss all my friends.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You miss them.

ISENBERG: They [unclear] that age.

LEVINE: Yeah?

ISENBERG: I should be like that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: God gave me a—a pr—a present. I [unclear], the present. And I appreciate—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: You could tell my son that too. He's wonderful. My son was very good and he's good now, even [unclear] see him, maybe every three months. But when I hear his voice, I'm happy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Good.

ISENBERG: What else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Okay.

ISENBERG: Everything else.

LEVINE: Is there anything—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can remember about your life, growing up, when you were a little girl? What kind of a little girl were you?

ISENBERG: Yes—

LEVINE: Were you a shy little girl? Were you a—a tomboy? What kind of a little girl were you?

ISENBERG: Okay.

LEVINE: When you were little. When you were gr—

ISENBERG: What can I—what can I tell you such things?

LEVINE: [chuckles] [pause] Was there anything—

ISENBERG: What do you want me—

LEVINE: Was there anything in Russia that you remember in particular?

ISENBERG: Well, what can I—the children, I had no [unclear]. Nothing. I had bad—everything is like a—[unclear] it was good. [unclear] the children [unclear] get mar—the grandchildren were getting married, getting divorced. We didn't know for such a thing. When I—when I didn't like my—I liked my boy. So my mother says, "No, this is not for you." So I didn't go with him.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: Now, there's such a thing.

LEVINE: Right.

ISENBERG: Now, [unclear] like him but she has to like him.

LEVINE: Right.

ISENBERG: Hmm.

LEVINE: It's a different time.

ISENBERG: [unclear]—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: You know, that's the way it is. It cha—times change.

LEVINE: Yes.

ISENBERG: Everything change, the time. But they have now to leave for—who knew—who knew machines for washing clothes? Used to wash clothes myself. Everybody.

LEVINE: What other things changed a lot?

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: Besides washing machines. The radio?

ISENBERG: Yeah, everything. There was nothing that there—here—was here. Nothing. The—[unclear] we used to buy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: You see. Look at that. Y—y—everything is electric. Everything is in this. So how could you have everything to—you wash floor, I used to have a kitchen [several words unclear] this year. I used to lay on the floor and wash on the knees. So that's why. I used to take care of [unclear]. I used to go—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: In Coney Island, was a place where they used to go there to [unclear] Saturday night. Every—they all had a different idea on how to live. My older brother liked cards. My oldest sister—

LEVINE: Sister, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: —liked—liked cards. She used to play cards with her family. Yes. Other ones used to like this. I liked my [unclear] and I used to do what I think is good for me. I used to go in the baths in Coney Island, go in the baths.

LEVINE: Tell me about the baths. What were they like?

ISENBERG: How many what?

LEVINE: What—what—what was it like? Describe it, the baths.

ISENBERG: The baths? Well, we used to go, like, Saturday night. I used to have my friend, my family, somebody [unclear]. My sister used to play cards in my kitchen because we used to live together. My father bought a house after. So I was downstairs, three rooms. My father made from two—from two families, three.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: [unclear] and basement, they used to make another apartment package.

LEVINE: Ah.

ISENBERG: You see?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And so my mother used to—we used to cook and used to buy groceries. They [unclear] the [unclear]. Not all [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Now, some of us can't do anything. We got to make a living. They got to work. The [unclear]. They did. They did everything. My mother used to get very sick. I used to take care of my—in her house and [several words unclear] and cook and give her eat and [unclear]. I [unclear] used to go back with my father again and [unclear]. And they do it now.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ISENBERG: And they do it now [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: With the mother. They told her like she would be the [several words unclear]. I says, "Nothing doing. I want to go by myself." I had such security, give them—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: [unclear]. And my doctor [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: And I'm here already about a year.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Thank God.

LEVINE: Can you remember when you went to Coney Island? When you went to the baths?

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: T—tell me about—I don't know what the baths were like. Tell me.

ISENBERG: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Tell me about the b—

ISENBERG: They haven't got any more of that—

LEVINE: Yeah. So tell me what they used to be like.

ISENBERG: There?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: What they used to did?

LEVINE: Yeah, what they used to do in the b—

ISENBERG: I used to g—I used to go every Saturday night—

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: —and leave everything, my house, because my sister was upstairs.  
My—

LEVINE: Playing cards, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: My father and mother was [unclear] so—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: [unclear]. And I was downstairs. So I used to go there with the friends, two friends, three friends—two—one friend. Used to do—first of all, I used to go in and they used to give me a massage, a washing—a water massage. A washing—good—bathing. And then we used to have supper. We used to rest. And then we used to go sleep. I mean, [unclear] because we went on a beach.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: See. And it's—sleep the night and the next morning, we used to have breakfast, used to go home.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: They used to get two massages there, a Swedish massage. I don't remember exactly—I paid \$5 [unclear]. Can you get that?

LEVINE: Hmm-uh.

ISENBERG: I used to go every time—I—when I used to go [unclear], I used to go [several words unclear], everything electric, and used to massage my—take up everything. Used to do 'em with a electric machine, all my body.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ISENBERG: And I used to go out of that there; I used to feel like I got off 20 years. They not do that there anymore.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: They don't do it. Maybe they do it [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And I used to feel so good.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: That's why I [several words unclear]. Some people, they like different things. They think it's good for them, no. It's good for your body to build up. Now, I try to move around.

LEVINE: Good.

ISENBERG: I try to do my share—I know what to do. They don't know what to do. And I don't want to say anybody [unclear] things that is not right. Don't tell. I got one—[unclear] should know too much because I never—maybe they don't like it.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, [clears throat] did you work in the garment industry? Did you work in what was called a sweatshop?

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: Do you know that word?

ISENBERG: Sure.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Then we had cars too. We had a Plymouth. We had a—a [unclear], Plymouth and a Chevy—cars. My—my husband was driving there and I—I didn't. No.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: Becau—

LEVINE: But when you were working, when you were sewing—

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: —did you work with a bunch of women in one place? Did you go to work in one of those shops where a lot of women were working?

ISENBERG: Shop, yeah. Shop.

LEVINE: What was your job? Do you remember what your job was when you went out to work?

ISENBERG: That's where I work. Then I work in a factory—

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: —with a lot of people and make friends with them. We used to go together to work, come back. She used to go—her home. I used to go to my home.

LEVINE: Did you—did you work on—you worked on men's shirts and then—

ISENBERG: And there—not long.

LEVINE: Not long. What'd you do after that?

ISENBERG: After that, I went to gar—to ladies garments, like nightgowns, you know. Used to make the tops nice, used to make the bottoms. I used to make—then after, I went to a place where they made the bottoms, you know, the hems.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Hems on there. I used to do the biggest thing. I used to make a hundred an hour, a hundred nighties [unclear] machine.

LEVINE: Wow! That's a lot.

ISENBERG: When anybody used to come to my [unclear]—Comar [PH]—I remember his name even.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ISENBERG: Comar, remember, and used to come to see him. She used to come over and show off with me how wonderful worker I am.

LEVINE: Ah.

ISENBERG: What else can I ask about that?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you—were you—

ISENBERG: And I used to wor—I used to work before I was ready and then after I was ready. I was [unclear]. I'd work until I got pregnant. For five months, I worked when I was pregnant.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And then I stop.

LEVINE: Then you stopped, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I stopped and I moved out of my father's house. In two months, having in Brownsville, that you have [unclear].

LEVINE: In Brownsville?

ISENBERG: Brownsville.

LEVINE: Oh, Brownsville. So you were in Brooklyn.

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I used to work there. I used to make a home, about three rooms. My husband used to work. Then he—he worked in—in the insurance company, oh, about—about 30 years, maybe.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: Oh, yeah. He was very honest, was very honest. When he left, they gave a good present, a watch. Like a [unclear]. Very nice, very honest.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ISENBERG: The [unclear]. Then he—then when he retired, he was there a part-time job. So he had a stand for newspapers.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm. And did you—

ISENBERG: In Jamaica—in Jamaica. I w—I lived 20 years in that apartment in—on the corner.

LEVINE: In Jamaica?

ISENBERG: In Jamaica.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Jamaica, and you got—a bus used to stop. A bus stopped [several words unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you like Jamaica? Did you like it in Jamaica?

ISENBERG: In Jamaica? Twenty years, I lived.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. And then—and then where did you—

ISENBERG: And then—and then they started come a little schwartz [PH]. Couldn't live anymore. Couldn't live anymore so I went [unclear]. They build the houses on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, you know. What do you call that name?

LEVINE: In Long Island?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: On Long Island? Did you move to Long Island?

ISENBERG: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Yeah, but there—where you have [unclear] there.

LEVINE: To L—well, we're on Long Island now.

ISENBERG: Now, it's Long Island.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: I was there 20 years. What else—I have a—[tape off/on] what that [unclear] in the houses. But I could hear—I could hear some people, real Jewish ones, what they talk, you know, to families, and I could hear.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: And I wrote to see. They mentioned my mother's and my father's names there. I couldn't have to—I didn't have anybody there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ISENBERG: Any—everybody—they used to—I came into the apartment. I heard my mother—my mother and my father at the [several words unclear]. And my mother had a—a nickname because she's [unclear] than my father. That's just Hannah [unclear]. I says, "That's my mother!"

LEVINE: [chuckles]

ISENBERG: But I didn't have the—I didn't have nobody to—to [unclear] city people.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: No. I couldn't.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, d—do you h—now, you've been here a long time.

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: I say, you've been in this country a long time. And now, there's a lot of people moving into this country.

ISENBERG: Oh—

LEVINE: Now, would you have any advice for somebody coming to this country, and they don't know the language and they don't know what to do. Do you have any advice for somebody like that?

ISENBERG: I don't know. I had a lot of—we had a very social life in my [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: A lot of friends [several words unclear]. I always had to be friendly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: And my father had—we used to work in the furniture when—when a couple got married and they want to have furniture, they used to come to my father to make it.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Used to make beds, used to make furniture, you know. A dresser.

LEVINE: Tables.

ISENBERG: A [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Beds, tables, chairs.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: All this, used to make.

LEVINE: Was he good?

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did he make them—they were nice?

ISENBERG: Beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Everybody crazy about my father and mother on the—in the little town.

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: They loved them. And they—my first name in Europe is [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: My—my Jewish name is [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh.

ISENBERG: I don't know why they gave my name, Becky. I don't know. I [unclear] Ray or Rachel, or whatever.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: So then you got to listen. You don't know yourself in a strange town. You can't help it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: Then after, was [unclear]. I became very friendly. I met people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Very friendly.

LEVINE: What—what was your father like? What was your father like? What was his temperament?

ISENBERG: Who?

LEVINE: Your father.

ISENBERG: My father?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ISENBERG: I never helped him. He always used to be by himself. He used to get jobs in—in old houses and make [unclear] and things in [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: He used to make a lot of [unclear].

LEVINE: Did he do that in this country too?

ISENBERG: Huh?

LEVINE: He did it in the Old Country.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: And here too?

ISENBERG: No.

LEVINE: Not here.

ISENBERG: Well, then they—with all the furniture in the Old Country. But here, when they came, he used to build houses.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Fixing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: [unclear] in partners. They—then they put their house in partners, the two brothers. She has four children. I had—my mother had four children. We lived together wonderful, never had an argument.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: Never was jealous, one another.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ISENBERG: No.

LEVINE: And what was your—

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: What was your father's personality? What kind of personality did you—did you—

ISENBERG: [unclear]—

LEVINE: —father have?

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: He was—he had a—a personality. Was he—

ISENBERG: [unclear]

LEVINE: Was he strict?

ISENBERG: Yeah. [pause] Don't they have lunch already?

LEVINE: Oh, it should be about lunchtime now. We'll see. We can go find out. Okay?

ISENBERG: You—can you still [unclear]?

LEVINE: Yeah. Is there anything else you can think of about coming to this country? About your life in this country?

ISENBERG: Ah.

LEVINE: Is there anything you want to say before we close about this country or being in this—

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: —country?

ISENBERG: I like my country. I like this country. I like this country. I have no kick coming.

LEVINE: No kick coming, huh?

ISENBERG: No.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe that's a good place to end.

ISENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: I want to thank you very much.

ISENBERG: I know.

LEVINE: Thank you for talking about this. Now, we'll have your voice on tape.

ISENBERG: [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay? Okay, thank you. This is Janet Levine signing off. I'm speaking with Bess—Becky Isenberg, who came here at the age of 16 in 1914 from Russia, and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]