

EI-1329

LOTTIE RHEINGOLD LEVINTON

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 4, 1921

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 18, 2004

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82

RUNNING TIME: 40:35

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: TAMARACK, FLORIDA

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

RUSSIA, 1922

AGE: LESS THAN 1 YEAR

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES: JOSKOV, RUSSIA; BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

LEVINE: Well, here I am in Tamarack, Florida and I'm with Lottie Levinton, who came from Russia when she was just a baby.

LEVINTON: Absolutely.

LEVINE: And you came with your mother?

LEVINTON: And father.

LEVINE: And father. Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and if we could start at the beginning and you say your birth date.

LEVINTON: June 4, '21.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

LEVINTON: Russia.

LEVINE: And what town or city?

LEVINTON: Joskov.

LEVINE: Can you—do you have any idea how to spell?

LEVINTON: [laughs]

LEVINE: No. [chuckles]

LEVINTON: [sighs] J-O-S-K-O-V. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, okay. That sounds reasonable. Okay. And—

LEVINTON: And Bernie's the same way. See, he'll—he'll probably clear it up.

LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles]

LEVINTON: Whatever he clears up is the truth.

LEVINE: Is true for—is true for you. Okay, 'cuz the next person we're going to interview came from the same place—

LEVINTON: Right.

LEVINE: —in Russia. Okay. Now, you said you had a Jewish name. What was your name that it would have been on the ship's manifest? What were you called when you came to this country?

LEVINTON: Joskov.

LEVINE: Well—

LEVINTON: Russian. That's Russian.

LEVINE: No. I mean you, your name. Your Jewish name and your maiden name.

LEVINTON: My Jewish name was the same. I didn't change.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So it was Lottie—

LEVINTON: Lottie—

LEVINE: —when you came. And what was your maiden name? Your name before you got married?

LEVINTON: Lottie.

LEVINE: No, your m—your last name? In other words, your father's—

LEVINTON: [unclear], oh. Rheingold.

LEVINE: Okay.

LEVINTON: Like the beer.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So would—is that with an R-E-I or R-H?

LEVINTON: R-H.

LEVINE: R-H-E-I—Gold?

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: Rheingold. Okay.

LEVINTON: In fact, in—in Yiddish, they say Rheine [PH] gold.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Pure gold.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Well, that's a nice name to start out with, huh? Okay. So what was your—

LEVINTON: And his is going to be the same.

LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles] And what was your father's name?

LEVINTON: S—actually, it was Sender [PH], but they called him Sender.

LEVINE: Sender—

LEVINTON: Sam. Say Sam.

LEVINE: Sam Sender. Okay. And your mother, what was her name?

LEVINTON: Minnie [PH].

LEVINE: Minnie. Do you happen—

LEVINTON: Mincy [PH], Mincy. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Mincy. And do you happen to know what her maiden name was before she married your father?

LEVINTON: My father's name was Sam.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: My mother's name was Minnie.

LEVINE: Okay. All right. Now, do you know—you, obviously, wouldn't have any memories of Russia, you, yourself, because you were a baby. But did your mother and father ever talk about life in Russia before they—

LEVINTON: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Tell me the kinds of things that they told you.

LEVINTON: The trouble is, my memory is not the same.

LEVINE: Okay. Whatever—whatever you remember is good and what you don't remember is fine. It doesn't matter.

LEVINTON: Bur—he probably will tell you more than I do.

LEVINE: Well, did you—do you know what your mo—your father did for work when he was there?

LEVINTON: When he was there, he had a pushcart with fruit and vegetables.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: That's how he started.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And he continued but he'd progress and g—have his own place. He was very nice to people. He was very aggressive and he was very anxious to learn the language, which he did. But being in business on the outside was easier to get acquainted with people.

LEVINE: Oh.

LEVINTON: So they were able to talk better. [clears throat] And I may be bragging but he was a very nice man, and my family were nice people and—

EI-1329/LEVINTON

LEVINE: How was your father to you? How—how did he treat you? How—

LEVINTON: He was a wonderful man. I have three brothers and h—he and my mother, may they rest, were just wonderful. They were good to everybody. They weren't just good to the—his children.

LEVINE: Can you think of any things that he tried to instill in you? In other words, values, attitudes? Anything that he—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: What?

LEVINTON: They wanted us to be on the straight line, to be honest. They wanted to—to mingle, be happy and be nice.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Now, you had three brothers, you say?

LEVINTON: Three brothers.

LEVINE: Three.

LEVINTON: Martin, David, Ira, Ju—yeah, I got three boys and a girl.

LEVINE: No, but y—your brothers. Not your children, but your brothers.

LEVINTON: Oh, my brothers. Martin, David, Ira—Martin, David, Ira. There's one more. I think I'm skipping one. [laughs]

LEVINE: And—and you—were you the baby?

LEVINTON: I was the y—baby. I was—

LEVINE: Did—did your—did your brothers come over from Russia?

LEVINTON: Hmm-uh, no.

LEVINE: They were—

LEVINTON: I was the only one that came over with [unclear].

LEVINE: Oh, so you were the oldest then? You must have been.

LEVINTON: Mmm, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. Okay. So do you—do you happen to know, by any chance, why your mother and father came here when they did?

LEVINTON: Well, you heard of the pogrom?

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: That's what they were in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they tried as much as they could to get out and mingle with the public, New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So they—

LEVINTON: It was a very—it was very rough with them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when they came, they ca—did they go to Brooklyn? Is that where they settled? Where did they settle?

LEVINTON: No. Well, yeah. We did go to Brooklyn. Yes, we did go to Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: But n—we also migrated to different areas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did—a—and—and that's where your father started with the pushcart—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: —in Brooklyn.

LEVINTON: Yes, with the wagon. But then he got a—a place, a permanent place where people recognized his job. It was a fruit and vegetable place and he did very well, because he was honest and he had good stuff and he was nice to people. And that's how I learned to be nice to people. And many times, if I'd get a little angry, my daughter, God bless her, she'd say, "Mom, be nice. Don't be rough."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did—

LEVINTON: And that is because of me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Because I—whenever they'd get annoyed, I said, "Be nice."

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So they gave it back to you. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they're lovely children. They're professionals.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And I'm proud of them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they come to visit me and I love them and I'm very happy with them.

LEVINE: Nice. Did you used to work in your father's—

LEVINTON: Sure.

LEVINE: —fruit and vegetable—

LEVINTON: We had a—on the avenue.

LEVINE: Which avenue? Do you h—do you remember?

LEVINTON: Blake [PH] Avenue.

LEVINE: Blake Avenue. [chuckles] Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Do you know the area?

LEVINE: Well, I—my stepfather was from there, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yeah. And—

LEVINE: Talk about the community. What was it like in Brooklyn?

LEVINTON: This?

LEVINE: No, in Brooklyn when you were growing up. Wh—what do you remember about that?

LEVINTON: Well, my father had a stand. From the stand, he opened up a business, which was nice after a while. And he was a very nice,

honest person and people liked him, and that's how I learned to be able to get along with people too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And my mother was a lovely woman but she was a housewife.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: Because she did the cooking. I, of course, did all the cleaning. [chuckles] I was the only girl. [laughs] I have four brothers. And we still talk to each other.

LEVINE: Really? Your brothers are—are around.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: We're a—we're a very close family.

LEVINE: Wonderful. You—you mentioned—wait. I'm going—I'm going to pause here. [tape off/on]

LEVINTON: —a fruit stand on the avenue. And every time we went to—came back from school, we would drop our books and relieve my father so he can go to sleep in the afternoon. And my brothers were very cooperative. They didn't say, "Well, I—I did it today and you do it tomorrow and we'll"—nothing. If we had to do something, we did it together.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And there was no fighting. Well, once in a while. [laughs] And—

LEVINE: You m—

LEVINTON: —we—we were a very close family.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And we still are.

LEVINE: Wonderful. You mentioned earlier, before we started the tape that your f—mother and father had it rough, that they went through a lot. Could you say any more about that? What—what did they have to endure, let's say, or go through as—as immigrants to this country?

LEVINTON: It was rough because they couldn't get what they wanted when they wanted in the areas they wanted, because some people didn't allow Jewish people in the area. It—it—it was—wasn't easy for Jewish people.

LEVINE: Do—can you think of any specific instances where either you were prejudiced against, or your mother and father were prejudiced against because you were Jewish? Any things that happened to you, or to them or your brothers?

LEVINTON: Well, now, my brothers weren't old enough to understand what was going on.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: But—

LEVINE: Like, for—

LEVINTON: Well, being Jewish wasn't easy. Let's face it. A lot of people were prejudiced. But we survived. We went to synagogue. We mingled. We—my father opened up a—a place on the avenue with a pushcart where he brought the—the wagon in the morning. When he had to close it, he brought it back to the stable and it was a little rough. But we learned that we have to cooper—cooperate. So every time, we would drop—my brother and I—I'm the only girl. And my brothers and I would drop our books and went—and went—ran home to let my father go to sleep, because he used to go to the market very early in the morning.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: It was rough but we managed. And my father and mother, God bless them, they were wonderful and they didn't cry. They—we were—they taught us not to be sorry for anybody, just to be nice to people. And that's what I teach my children too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm, uh-hmm. [clears throat] Let's see. So, how—were you treated differently because you were the girl? Were there differences between the way you were treated—

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: —and your brothers?

LEVINTON: I got the worst end of it. I was the one that had to clean and do everything. [chuckles] But then my brothers took over. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, yeah? Good. [laughter] Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: I wouldn't let them get away with it because I was the oldest.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. And what kind of a little girl were you? What—what was your personality?

LEVINTON: Well, at the beginning, I was a tomboy. But since I had to mingle, I joined everybody. I even climbed the ropes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. The—what did you do for fun, growing up? What did you do, like when you'd come home from school? Besides working and helping your father out, w—what did you—

LEVINTON: They gave us time to—to—

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: —move around ourselves. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: Well, we went to school. That's what—one thing, my she rest, always harped on, school, education. And thanks to her, we all survived and—and now, my children are principals and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: What can I tell you?

LEVINE: Wow. Oh, that's nice. Yeah. Okay. We're going to pause here. [people talking in background]

LEVINTON: People from my group.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah?

LEVINTON: Well, we—I—I had a good life because I stayed in my own group and we managed, no matter what the religion was.

LEVINE: So did you mingle with other children who were Catholic or—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: —Protestant or—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yes. I did not—I was not prejudiced. And I taught my children to be the same way.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And to this day, I'm proud of them.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was it like for you and your mother and father, learning English?

LEVINTON: [chuckles] My mother went to school every night. And I used to laugh and say, "Mom, when are you getting your diploma already?" [laughs] But she'd go ahead. She would make fun of it too. And she still continued. She was so—she was so important with—with education.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: She went to night school. She couldn't see. She couldn't—because she had trouble with her eyes. And she didn't let anything bother her. She continued going to school.

LEVINE: Did—did your mother—

LEVINTON: At night.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your mother and father become citizens?

LEVINTON: Yes. I had become a citizen too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So do you remember that when they became citizens? Can you remember—

LEVINTON: The time, you mean?

LEVINE: Yeah. The day that they be—got this—

LEVINTON: Offhand, I can't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Because my memory is going now, anyway.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah, well, all right. So in other words, you came in, let's say, '21 or '22—

LEVINTON: '21.

LEVINE: 1922.

LEVINTON: '22.

LEVINE: W—somewhere in there.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Depression, how that affected your family in the '30s?

LEVINTON: Yeah. We had to curb some things [chuckles] we wanted badly. But my folks always—they always had some time to—to save money. My mother was very conscious about education. And sh—if we wanted to do anything that she thought wasn't right, she wouldn't let us. And she says, "You're going to go to school and you're going to learn." And thankful for that, my kids are professionals.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how was school for you?

LEVINTON: All right. It wasn't spectacular but I got along with the people. And I learned what I had to but I wasn't a terrific student.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: But I—because I had—as soon as I came out of school, I had to run to the pushcart to help my father.

LEVINE: Yeah. How long did you stay in school before you stopped and—and went to work?

LEVINTON: All the time. I—I graduated.

LEVINE: Did you graduate from high school or grade school, or both?

LEVINTON: Both, both.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when you graduated from high school, what did you do then?

LEVINTON: What did I do? Work.

LEVINE: I—for your father or someplace else?

LEVINTON: It's according. If my father needed me, I helped him. If I was able to get some other thing, I would do that too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then did you work for a while before you were married?

LEVINTON: Oh, yes. I worked.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: Because we had to make money.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: I mean, my father had the pushcart so we had—we had to get more money.

LEVINE: And what about your brothers?

LEVINTON: Oh, they were too young yet.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then when they got older, did they go into your father's business or what did they do?

LEVINTON: No, they went on their own. And they got—they were very good, very talented and—and till today, they are very educated and I'm very proud of them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: They're—they are very—they have beautiful jobs.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Beau—n—not just jobs. Education. They're—they're teachers. They are—they're in that field.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they're very bright and I'm very proud of them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So you must have been—did you help take care of them, since you were older than them?

LEVINTON: Of course. And I still had to do things in the house. But the children helped too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: I made sure that there was no idling.

LEVINE: [laughs] Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they were very good.

LEVINE: Yeah. Can you talk about the neighborhoods in Brooklyn where you grew up? What—what—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: —were they like?

LEVINTON: We had a lot of fun.

LEVINE: And what would you do?

LEVINTON: I—pr—probably have you hear—heard. We played balls and what do you call it?

LEVINE: Marbles?

LEVINTON: Marbles.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah?

LEVINTON: We—we weren't shy. We were no-goodnicks. [laughter]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: When a holiday came and we had those balls that we can throw back and forth, we had fun.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: I think, because we didn't have too much progress, we managed to go along and be happy and do the best we can.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: My mother went to school every night. And I said, "Mom, when are you going to get your diploma?" And we would all get together and laugh. But she finished school.

LEVINE: Wow. So what did you do as a family? Can you remember any things that you did, places you went, or just dinners or—

LEVINTON: We did things that I—we're doing now. We h—we enjoyed whatever we had and we were happy, because we didn't have too much. And we managed to help each other.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And that all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And we went to Hebrew school. My mother and father insisted, especially my mother, that we had to have an education. It was rough but we did it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And now my brothers are professionals and they're—I'm very proud of them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: My kids followed the same way.

LEVINE: Did—d—were there a lot of i—people who had immigrated in your neighborhood?

LEVINTON: Yes, yes. Because I couldn't afford to go to another n—neighborhood [unclear] bigger, whatever. I had to mingle with the people and we—we managed. We got along.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So—

LEVINTON: We didn't cry.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. I guess if you come from another country, you—

LEVINTON: Mmm.

LEVINE: —realize, right? More.

LEVINTON: Yes. And every little thing we had, we—we got, we valued and we enjoyed. And we got along. And—

LEVINE: Can you think of something that you wanted or that your mother and father wanted that you had to work to get?

LEVINTON: Y—well, I'll never forget, I wanted a—a doll and carriage. They couldn't afford it. What should I do? So I waited and waited until somebody threw out a carriage and I took it. [laughs]

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

LEVINTON: You know, we—we—we did with simple things because we couldn't have. So we managed with a—a used chair or a used—whatever they had then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah. So do you—did you ever go places like Coney Island—

LEVINTON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Tell me about Coney Island.

LEVINTON: That was the only—a pleasure, because we couldn't travel too far. And we went to the beach. We bathed in the sun. That was our treat. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: But we had very good neighbors. Whoever had a car or whoever had a—had room for us to go, we'd push ourselves in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

LEVINTON: And the funny thing is, they cooperated. They didn't say, "Oh, I have no room," or, "I don't want you here." We managed very nicely.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And I taught my children the same way. And as I repeat, I'm proud of them.

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: They're very—they're talented. They, themselves, are principals today.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And I have a daughter now and, God bless her, she is very attentive, very helpful to children and people. And I'm very proud of her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Why don't—

LEVINTON: And my boys.

LEVINE: Why don't you say how you met your husband?

LEVINTON: At the pushcart.

LEVINE: [chuckles] How did it happen?

LEVINTON: Well, I went to sch—he was older than me. When I went to school, I passed by where my father had his fruit and vegetable stand. And—just trying to remember. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah, and—and you're talking about meeting your husband.

LEVINTON: And he had a store right next to the store that my father had.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: So every time when I passed the store, I stopped because he had a candy store.

LEVINE: Oh.

LEVINTON: So I had to buy some candy. And that's how I became acquainted with him. And he was older than me. And then we got married. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Now, so your father must have known him, if he—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: —right in the next—

LEVINTON: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yeah. Because man—well, at that time, he had a—a pickle stand.

LEVINE: Oh.

LEVINTON: So I had to pass the store because I had to relieve my father so he can go—so then my father can go to sleep.

LEVINE: Right.

LEVINTON: So I met him and then, before you knew it, we became acquainted and before you knew it, we got married. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Can you describe the—the—either the stand your father had—what was it—what did it look like? What—what do you—

LEVINTON: An ordinary stand right in the open, because as soon as they finished their work they locked it up and went their—went their merry way.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: So—and then when we finished, packed it up, put it out again for the next day.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was the pickle stand like?

LEVINTON: We had a lot of fun with the pickle stand because the pickle man was very generous. And we'd pass by. I'd come home from school; we'd pass by and he'd let us take a pickle. [laughter]

LEVINE: Now, this isn't your husband—

LEVINTON: No.

LEVINE: —you're talking about. This is somebody else. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Yeah. But my father had a stand right near the—th—his stand.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: You know what it is? We were satisfied with the little things and we didn't request too much, so everybody was happy.

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: This way, we didn't say, "Gee, he's got a—a—a beautiful thing here. Why can't I have the same thing?" No. And we always say—my mother and father say, "Look, I can do it. This is what I can do. I'll helpful as much as I can." And believe me, we got along splendidly.

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

LEVINTON: We didn't have, so we made the best of it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And we didn't cry. We cried secretly.

LEVINE: Oh. Can you describe what y—like the places, or one of the main places you lived in, growing up? What was that like?

LEVINTON: A little rough because we were in a section where they had open stands. And—

LEVINE: An open stand. Let me make sure I know what you mean. In other words, it's—you can close it down but it's not—it's not like a shop?

LEVINTON: It is, but you have to open and close it. And they—they have a—a—like a—like a store—n—it's n—not a storage. It's a—not a cage. But it's—it's a place where you have to pay to get a certain area for yourself.

LEVINE: But it's not inside a building.

LEVINTON: It is.

LEVINE: Oh, it is inside a building.

LEVINTON: It is. It is and it isn't, because it's mixed. One side can be fruit and vegetables. Another one can be something else.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But you don't go in the door into a building.

LEVINTON: Yes, you can.

LEVINE: Oh, you can. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Here, we're going to pause for a second. [tape off/on]
A lot of people who came through Ellis Island went to Brooklyn.

LEVINTON: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about Brooklyn? About growing up in Brooklyn?

LEVINTON: I liked it. We had no other choice. So we used to take the train to go to the—to the beach. And we would take bundles of food and eat it on the beach. We enjoyed it because we didn't have any other entertainment.

LEVINE: Did you ever go to the Yiddish theater?

LEVINTON: I lived there because my mother and father used to go. That was their entertainment.

LEVINE: Oh, tell anything you can remember about the Yiddish theater.

LEVINTON: Well, my mother had—my mother and father had—oh, I was the only girl. So I could join my mother and father wherever they went. But my brothers had to be left with somebody h—who h—stayed and helped them. And I was always going with them. Like, they left my brothers behind with somebody. [chuckles] But they always made sure that I would go along with them.

LEVINE: And can you remember any of the—like, Molly Pecan or any of the people that—about—in the Yiddish theater? Wh—

LEVINTON: Yes.

LEVINE: What was the—

LEVINTON: We always went to—see, my mother would leave the children—my mother and father would leave the children home with somebody, of course. But I had to go with them. It was just automatic. If they went someplace, I had to go. The boys'll have to wait.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And can you—

LEVINTON: And boys are more important in Jewish family.

LEVINE: I—why do you say that?

LEVINTON: I don't know if it's a tradition or something, but it's—it just works out that way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: The boy is more important.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But you got to go with your mother and father.

LEVINTON: Because I was the oldest—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

LEVINTON: —and the only girl.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Because my mother had four ch—boys.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And can y—

LEVINTON: But we didn't fight—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: —all the time.

LEVINE: Right. [laughter] Well, can you say anything about the immigrant people when they went to the Yiddish theater? What it meant to them or—

LEVINTON: Oh, they loved it. That was their best shows. They made sure, like here, if you wanted to go see a—a nice movie or—or a play or anything yet, you go. Right?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: There, at that time, it was a treat for us. So we used to get a babysitter and leave the children behind. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: We managed.

LEVINE: So the Yiddish theater was their biggest treat. Now, were there any societies or organizations—

LEVINTON: Always. The Jewish people always had an organization.

LEVINE: And what did—in other words, your mother and father belonged to it.

LEVINTON: Mmm.

LEVINE: And what di—what did it involve? What did they do in the organization?

LEVINTON: The same thing they're doing now.

LEVINE: Which is?

LEVINTON: They have meetings. They have groups. They have whatever you want. It's—it's the same thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did they have, like, cemetery plots?

LEVINTON: Oh, sure. I'm already registered.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. How about, like, loaning money or borrowing money? Di—were the organizations helpful in that way?

LEVINTON: Well, they—they had organization to that. And there are certain groups that you could join, certain groups that you don't want to join. And it works the same way as anybody else. Same traffic here as there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —think your mother and father had certain attitudes or had certain parts of their personality that came about because they had started out in Russia and came to this country? In other words, did that make a difference in the kind of person—persons they were?

LEVINTON: Ah, I'm talking for myself.

LEVINE: Okay.

LEVINTON: My mother and father had it rough. But they never complained and we struggled but we managed. And when my brothers would get home from school, they would drop the books and go to my father to—what do you call it—to the pushcart—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: —to help my father so he could go to sleep. Because he used to get up early in the morning to take care—to buy his—his equipment to sell to people on—on the street.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Did he ever go around to houses?

LEVINTON: N—no.

LEVINE: No.

LEVINTON: He had a stand.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: But he had to take it out of the—where they put the—the—where—where they carry the st—their—their fixtures. They'd take it out of the garage, bring it back at—at night and wasn't easy, but we did it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So you think they were happy here?

LEVINTON: Yes. They didn't like it but they made the best of it and we all got along very well. We used to go to the synagogues. We mingled with trips to shul and occasions. See, the Jewish people always congregated together and we got along very well.

LEVINE: Was religion a big part of your life then?

LEVINTON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Oh, yes. We managed. We managed very well. We didn't have too many fights.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: I can't say we didn't have any, but we did. And I brought up my children and I'm very proud of them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And they're professionals today.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, did your mother and father ever talk to you—say anything about Ellis Island? What—

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: —it was like when they came through?

LEVINTON: Yeah, they c—talked all the time.

LEVINE: Oh. So it's—a—can you think of anything they said about coming to this country?

LEVINTON: Yeah, they—

LEVINE: Ellis Island—

LEVINTON: They would—they would talk Russian so that I wouldn't understand.

LEVINE: Oh.

LEVINTON: [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So—but you mentioned before the tape was on, h—what did you call it? You said they crossed the—

LEVINTON: Grinitz [PH].

LEVINE: Grinitz.

LEVINTON: Yeah, that's sort of like an area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and that was what—what people talked—what—th—that’s how people talked about coming across the ocean—

LEVINTON: Right.

LEVINE: —to America.

LEVINTON: Right. Yeah.

LEVINE: Crossing the Grinitz.

LEVINTON: Right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

LEVINTON: The Grinitz.

LEVINE: Grinitz. [chuckles] Okay.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Because we all came from there. Me—including me. I was a—I was one year old when I came here.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINTON: And we survived, and that’s why, when people cry, I says, “You got the wrong person. Don’t talk to me about it.” [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you have any other wisdom that you’ve come to in your lifetime that you would want to say?

LEVINTON: Yeah, be nice to people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: Don’t envy anybody because you never know what the other party has.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And so far, everything’s been going smoothly.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how do you like your life here now?

LEVINTON: I like it very much. First of all, not that I'm bragging, I feel that, wherever I go and whatever I do, I make the best of it. And I don't envy anybody, because whatever they have, they earned. And if they complain, I said, "Don't come to me. You came to the wrong person." I said, "I managed. You'll have to learn the same way."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So the—your attitude that you have now here really came from growing up in your family. Yeah.

LEVINTON: Exactly, because we knew what hardship was and we knew how to be nice to people. Like many times, I will say something to my daughter and she'll say, "Mom, be nice." And now, mind you, she knows what's—what we went through. And she has anything she wants. She's a principal herself. And she puts me in my place too sometime, when I say something and she says, "Mom, be nice. Be nice." "Okay." I said, "Out of the mouths of babes."

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: You've got to learn from them too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And my b—sons, God bless them, are professionals.

LEVINE: Why don't you mention your children's names for the tape?

LEVINTON: Martin, Ira, David, Judy.

LEVINE: Three boys and a girl.

LEVINTON: Three boys and a girl.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINTON: And they're all nice to each other.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: And I love them all. And they're very respectful to me.

EI-1329/LEVINTON

LEVINE: Wonderful. Now, what would you say you're very proud of?

LEVINTON: All of them.

LEVINE: Ah.

LEVINTON: Absolutely, because they're all good in their way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: They have all graduated. They have good jobs. They are teachers. I could keep on naming and naming and naming—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: —because I'm so—I'm very proud of them.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Okay.

LEVINTON: Because they saw how I live and what I could do and what I can't do. And they have never pushed me and said, "Oh, Janie has a—a big doll in the"—and I said, "Look, I'd love to get that for you but Dad and I can't do it." Not another word and they didn't say a thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So that's the way you grew up and that's the way your children grew up. Uh-huh.

LEVINTON: Why should I be different than them?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINTON: I don't mean for them to be a burden. And I'm not pushing my troubles on you. But you've got to realize that the times are different and we have to cooperate. And they all have been very nice to me.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

LEVINTON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of relevant to coming to this country—

LEVINTON: Just [unclear] happy I'm here.

LEVINE: Great. Okay. Well, I have been speaking with Lottie Levinton, who came here as a little baby, not even a year old—

EI-1329/LEVINTON

LEVINTON: Right, absolutely.

LEVINE: —in '21 or '22.

LEVINTON: I—I was just a year when they came here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So it was probably 1922 then, from Russia. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm—I just want to say, today is the 18th of May, the year 2004.

LEVINTON: If you say so.

LEVINE: [laughs] Okay. And I'm signing off. Thank you.

LEVINTON: You're welcome. Nice talking to you.

LEVINE: You too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]