

EI-1373
JOSEPH ZJAWIN
BIRTHDATE: NOVEMBER 24, 1931
INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 20, 2005
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 71
RUNNING TIME:
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER:
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: EVAN TAPARATA
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ELIZABETH ORCUTT/IS

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: The following interview was conducted with Joseph Zjawin, a man of Polish descent who was born as a second generation United States Citizen.

LEVINE: Today is January 20, 2005. I'm here at Ellis Island with Joseph,

ZJAWIN: Zjawin.

LEVINE: Zjawin, which could also be pronounced 'Zee-yavin'.

ZJAWIN: Correct.

LEVINE: He did not immigrate through Ellis Island; however, his parents immigrated to this country. And he worked in Jersey City in and around Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty and can talk about the, some of the history of these places. So this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service. And if we could just start; if you could just say your birth date and where you were born.

ZJAWIN: Yes. My name is Joseph Zjawin and I was born November 24, 1931.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

ZJAWIN: In Newark, New Jersey.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you grow up in Newark?

ZJAWIN: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Okay. And why don't we start with your mother and father; if you could say your father's name and where he came from.

ZJAWIN: Yes, my father was Frank Zjawin. And where he came from in southern Poland was in the, what they called the 'mountain area', the Carpathians. And the name of the town in particular was called Nysa, N-Y-S-A. My mother also was born in that town. And just a little – you might say, perfect time to elaborate on this – my father was seven-years old when my mother was born. And the custom in the country of Poland, particularly in Nysa, was to visit the people who had a new child. What I'm saying in essence is, my father saw my mom when he was seven-years old, when she was first born. So talk about a Valentine's Day! Little did he know that some day – and I'm the beneficiary of it – a beautiful occurrence happened there. So that's how my mom and dad – really, their first meeting then. They didn't even know they were meant for each other.

LEVINE: Wow. Well now did they know, did they come here together? Were they married when they came to this country?

ZJAWIN: No. Well they were married. But what it was (like most immigrants in them days) someone proceeded to create a nest, you might say – somewhere for the wife to come with the child, if there was children. And there was a son born in Europe, with just -- his name was Walter. My father actually came

through Ellis Island. My mom came in through Canada. And the reason I'm mentioning this is because in them old days... I'm talking now 1914, 1915 – most people had what they called a *pyaziena*. We call it a sleeping bag. And I remember growing up and having a *pyaziena* that my mom brought from Europe. And many, many years later I asked her about that. And I asked her if she made this bag. She said, 'I did, but in Europe.' And I said, 'Well, what do you mean, in Europe?' And she said, 'Well, I made that and when I immigrated to America, I took this bag with me.' And I said, 'Why, Mom?' She said, 'Because in them days, you didn't know where the motels or hotels (and there was no such thing) – you made do. If you slept in a bus station, a train station, wherever. But you had to bring your own wit' ya.'

They have a saying in the Polish nation and it goes (speaks Polish) To translate that, it means 'he who carries his own, never has to beg'. In other words, you go out prepared because you don't know what the eventualities are going to be. My father was — I do know that -- he was more fortunate in that he did come directly into the United States through Ellis Island. Also, many of his brothers that came the same route. In that time in history, in the United States it was not too much of a problem to be admitted into the United States. With a simple reason – they needed a work force. And most people were excepted *carte blanche*. I think that they only thing that could have defeated your coming to America was the fact -- if you had a commutable disease, or you were a criminal, or some other thing to that effect. And of course, over the years, what they've done (which is a big improvement) they check the person out before they came to America. Years ago, if you came to America and they found these things out – I think they called this 'The Isle...

LEVINE: ...of Tears. Yeah. What year -- around when did your mother and, or father arrive?

ZJAWIN: Well, it was around the year – prior to the First World War. So that would have been somewhere in the 1917's. The – of course my father (like most men did in them days, even today it's still in vogue) the husband goes and creates a home, or gets something going for them before he brings his wife and then possibly has a family here. So my mom followed my father, roughly about 1918, 1919. And then this in itself was colossal on my mother's part because coming from Canada to Jersey City, New Jersey in them days; -- there wasn't too many good roads. How she ever found her way from Montreal, Canada [Laughs] to Jersey City, New Jersey...I'm still wondering about that. And I asked her about that once and she said, 'Joey, where there's a will, there's a way.' [Laughs] I guess, you know, Mom had her act together. And I gotta say it the way it is. She – a take charge person.

LEVINE: Yeah, it sounds like it. Just to clarify something, how do you spell the, the sleeping bag in Polish?

ZJAWIN: I'm not quite sure, I will try it. It's pye—pye--p – p – p --. Can I write that? Maybe if I write it. (sound of writing) I think it goes like that, if you can check that out.

LEVINE: P-Y-A-Z-I-E-N-A.

ZJAWIN: Yes. I'm not sure of that spelling, but it's close.

LEVINE: Alright, well it's close. Now, just mention your father's name, and your mother's name and maiden name.

ZJAWIN: Yeah, my father's name was Frank Zjawin. There was a family of five boys and one sister. And my mother's maiden name was Malvina Andryciak. And, of course, we used to kid Mom and Dad [Laughs]; they went from A to

Z. 'Cause Andryciak starts with an A and my father's name, it starts with a Z!

LEVINE: Can you spell your mother's maiden name?

ZJAWIN: Andryciak, A-N-D-R-Y-C-I-A-K. And Malvina, of course, I was proud of that name because I remember hearing about the islands down around Argentina. They call them The Malvinas. And I thought they belonged to my mother! Both laugh] Oh, honest to God. It was good to be a kid, it was good to be a kid, you know?

LEVINE: So how was it that your mother came through Canada?

ZJAWIN: Don't really know. I never even -- I -- questioned her on that. But it, there must have been a reason for it. Whether it was, maybe there was the capacity was filled here or something. Or got on the wrong boat, which could happen, many times. But at any rate that's -- luckily, they rendezvoused again, because I wouldn't be talkin' on this microphone today [Laughs]. And of course, when they came to America, [Not understood] I guess it's called the moxie in a sense. Because they had eight children here. And I wondered, I still wonder, how they fed us and kept us intact. And I asked my father this.

And, of course, being that you know my age, so I go back a bit. Meaning, there was a lot of horses on the streets when I was a kid growing up! There was a bread man, there was a peddler, and on and on -- a milkman and so on. They all had horses. And I said to my father once, I said, 'Dad, how did you do this? I mean, how did you supply us all with our needs?' And he said, 'Joseph,' he said, 'you just got to have a sense of direction. You gotta get focus.' This is what he said to me and he used them horses as an example. He said, 'You ever see Mr. Schultz's horse?' He said, 'You did

take a good look at the head of this horse?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'What did you see, Joseph?' I said, 'Well, I don't know, Pop, tell me.' He said, 'Well, most horses had blinders on. And them blinders were on the side of the horse's head.' And the reason for that was that the horse would be focused to go where he's going. Because if he'd had these distractions he'd be bolting or reacting and something like – so if he didn't know something was coming, the horse was sort of calm.

And he said, 'This is the way I went about it too. I put blinders on to what was on the left and I just kept my...' Well, we Americans call it this -- 'As you wander on through life, let this be your goal. Keep your eye upon the doughnut, and not upon the hole.' [Laughs] So, that's just my father had that – let's put it this way, he was a focused guy. He did have a supporting cast, which is very, very important. That means he had brothers that were here in the United States already. One was Michael. That I remember – he had a milk business. And the other one was Anthony; he had a grocery store. And I also think he was an inspector here at Ellis Island. And this is what one of my cousins, he said he saw it on the Internet. So, presumably, it must've have some validity to it.

And by them helping one another out, which we still see it's happening in Amer-- and that's a blessing. Because America – we could use the word 'mosaic,' and it's true. But if only we can -- like sort of, I like (in my own way of thinking) I like who I am. I like what my background is meaning, my ethnic background. Yes, I'm proud of it but not pompous of it. I like my religious affiliation but not pompous about it. I understand there's others, too, on this planet. The forest is filled of many different trees. I never heard of a tree arguing with another tree. And I sometime wonder why we have to exert our will, to more or less dominate somebody by our opinion. I think there's a man that lived five hundred years ago, his name

was William Shakespeare and he said it the best --'A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.'

So I'm a firm believer in **by example**, not so much with the words. You just show me, let me observe. I think even today, Mrs. Levine and I were stopped in one concession here, and we had a small conversation about people. And I said to her that I -- everybody is on a level field with me in the beginning. I -- you are just born into the world -- just like I was. We're even. Where I make my determination -- how I'm gonna to deal with a person -- is by their behavior. Not that they have to live up to my expectations. But if I feel that person is obnoxious, arrogant, pushy, shovy, dominating; I'll remove myself. I'm not gonna try to convince them and hopefully they don't convince me. So I (more or less like, again, using little clichés) if it's warm out, you take your coat off. And if it's cold out, you put a coat on. What I'm saying in essence is, you make the adjustments. The world will not make the adjustment. *You* have to fit in. It's just that simple.

LEVINE: Well, you said you learned that from one of your nun teachers in Catholic school. So you grew up in Newark, and you went to Catholic school. And what did your father do for work when you were growing up?

ZJAWIN: Oh, this is beautiful. Well, you know, children are children. And I thought I had the greatest dad in the world. I still do. [Pauses] Once -- I think most children have this in school -- they have 'Show and Tell'. And when the nun asked me what my father does for a living -- listen to this one -- he worked on a railroad. But I thought they called my father when the trains went off the track. And I thought my father was the strongest man in the world, and he went -- he picked the train up and put it back on the track. And the nun concurred. She -- 'Oh that's wonderful, Joe. Your father has a very important job.' Oh, that's the -- that's the -- my dad wor-- he worked on the

Central Railroad of New Jersey. Here – at the – this -- where it's just a little way from the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. So. And then, of course, like things in them days – I almost followed somewhat in his footsteps. Because when I got out of high school looking for jobs and all that and Pop suggested I go down. And I did. And I got the job and it worked out pretty well. I worked in a couple different departments on the railroad. And I think, Mrs. Levine, you recall, I mentioned something to you. It sort of sparked me. And I'd been working along the docks here. Some nights and the breeze is coming in, whether it be winter or summer. There was that longing of far away places with strange sounding names. And I heard Perry Como sing that song; it was like almost a catalyst. Well, I joined the Marine Corps. And I was about eighteen-years old at that time. And naturally, I was more concerned coming home and telling my mother about this than getting killed in combat. Because I figured my mother'd kill me before I go [Laughs].

LEVINE: She wouldn't want you to do that.

ZJAWIN: No.

LEVINE: Now was this World War – wait a minute, World War II?

ZJAWIN: No, it was the Korean War. It was back in 1951, '52, '53. And, of course, this—with the impetus here was that I wanted to go see the world. And even if it cost me my life, [Laughs] I was gonna go see the world. So I joined the Marine Corps. And then everything – to be truthful with you, it was the best experience I ever had in my life.

LEVINE: Well why do you say that?

ZJAWIN: Well, you had to be self-sufficient. You – mama wasn't there, poppa wasn't there; nobody was there. You had no supporting cast, either you did it or you didn't. And I think I, mentioned you earlier in the day of Mr. McMahon – he used to be a sidekick for Johnny Carson – and they had beautiful write up about him in the newspaper. And when I read this article I said to myself, 'No.' I said, 'Oh, thank you, God.' I said, 'Finally I see – I met somebody who's on the same wavelength as I am.' And in his -- the sort of -- biography of this gentleman, he said something to this effect. He said, when he was in the Marine Corps, there's two things he took with him when they went home and when he left the service. And he said the first thing was this -- to be on time. And the second one is come prepared for what you have to do.

I don't want to blow my own horn, but this has been almost the way I've been in life. And let me tell you what happened, what prompted me to get my act together at a very early age. It was difficult going from Newark to Jersey City in them days. They had trolley cars. There was two bridges you had to cross, sometimes the bridge was open. I was on the extra list for work. They'd call you up at ten o'clock, tell you to be there for twelve o'clock. And trying to fit into their puzzle sometimes was difficult. I worked there for about a year and half, two years. And many a time (through no fault of my own) I left in enough time...what I thought to get to work. And once I came in late – maybe fifteen minutes – about after six months of working there. No one said anything. And then about, maybe six months later, it happened again -- the bus, and the bridges, and all that. And I came in fifteen minutes late.

And I figured the same thing was gonna happen, it's just another thing. No it wasn't. My father worked there, and the Mr. Ford who was a supervisor said to my father, he said, 'Frank, you're a good man, you're always here on time,' and so on, so on. And, 'But Frank, listen, you've got to talk to your

son. He's been late twice in one year; fifteen minutes. Tell him there's ten thousand men waiting to take his place. Either he's on time, or we're going to have to move him.' Well, maybe it seemed a little crude and rough and demanding on their part but maybe they were right also. Because I was about nineteen at that time (I'm seventy-four right now) and I'll tell ya. I very seldom miss the boat because it was, a wake up call – 'The world is not waiting for you, Joey. It's the other way around.' So it's called punctuality, if you can put anything into it. And, of course, like little -- little tidbits along the way. Like on this tape, there are some reference to my schooling with the nuns and so on. And I think it's coming through loud and clear on this particular tape -- what took place when I was a child about seven-years old.

In them days, there was a lot of children going to Catholic parochial schools. At any rate, the nun who we had, she said to us one day – remember we're children seven-years old. She got up at the blackboard and took a piece of crayon and she started to scribble. And she looked at us all and said, 'Children, what did I write here?' And we all giggled. 'Mmmm,' Sister said, 'very good. Okay, I got your attention.' Then sister said to us – 'Sister' incidentally is what they called the nuns in the Catholic Church at that particular time. She said, 'Children, I'm gonna say something to you and I want you to tell me what I said.' And then she got in front of us and she said, 'Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.' And again, we all giggled. And Sister said, 'Okay, now we're gonna get serious. I'm gonna go up to the blackboard and I'm gonna write what I wanted to say. And then I'm gonna tell you what I wanted to say.' And she wrote these words: 'Handwriting is another form of communication. If people cannot read your handwriting, you are not communicating. If you do not enunciate and elaborate on what you have on your mind, people don't understand you. So you got what we call a breakdown in communication.'

She said, 'If you can't write too well -- the penmanship isn't so great, print. Because maybe you'll write a letter and it goes on and on! There's ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty people are gonna look at this and they'll have no idea what you had in mind. And they had what they call a **dead letter file**, so it'll just go nowhere. And it's the same thing if you're not more or less -- like, you don't elaborate on what you need.' And she also said, 'If you have any like, words, meaning --.' Well, let me give you an example. In the Marine Corps, we have a lot of words that meant something to another Marine but not so much to the general public. Like **gizmo** is a good example. If somebody said, 'What's that gizmo?' Well, in the average person's jargon, there's another word. It's, 'What is that thing you've got in your hand.' If you said it this way, a person would -- they can understand you. But if you said, 'What's that gizmo?' it's like another language you're speaking. So she said, 'Make it very emphatic that you don't mix up your street language and how you *kibitz* with your friends with the language that most people can relate to. So, in essence, I had some beautiful people that I rubbed shoulders with. Little did I know that it was gonna pay off. It really, truly paid off.

LEVINE: Well why don't you talk about the work that you did that brought you close to Ellis Island and the Statue.

ZJAWIN: Okay. I do wanna, I do want to bring just one story into mind. It happened quite a few years ago. And I had the good fortune of being at the Statue of Liberty that particular day. And one of the attendants made an announcement, and he said, 'If anybody would like to take a trip over from,' (from this was from the Statue of Liberty) 'over to Ellis Island, we have a limited amount. We can only take forty people.' 'Yippee,' I said to myself. And I went along with this group. And I saw Ellis Island when it was literally -- it was absolutely gone. Vine covered, paint peeling off the ceilings and walls, dank smelling. You name it, it had it here. And,

LEVINE: What year was that roughly?

ZJAWIN: I don't -- I don't know. What time did they -- they -- actually -- ?

LEVINE: They closed in '54.

ZJAWIN: Yeah. It was maybe about, maybe in the seventies, I think. Something like that. And it was a depleted building; it was like a derelict -- completely, absolutely. It was just in a state of decay. It was ready to collapse. But magic happened over there that day. And as the lady was taking us through and explaining different things to us, and what stuck in my mind in particular -- I tell you the truth, the, you get a feeling. I got the feeling anyway. It was almost like it was a -- I'm not gonna say a haunted house that was like scary. But it was, you could almost feel the people who came through here. It was almost like a spiritual thing. And I thought I, that was unique for me. But I'll tell you at the end of my little talk, how this thing came together. One thing she said, that attendant, was like this -- she asked us all, she'd project a question, 'Does anybody here like prunes?' And some people volunteer, say, 'Yeah, occasionally.' She, 'Well, how would you like to have them two and three times a day?' She said that was the fare sometimes. Because, you know, a limited amount of food, and you had the food that stood up well. This is what they sent and bought and fed to people.

Scared? Absolutely scared. Because, you know, this was a moment of truth. You just hoped you didn't rub the guy wrong, or the woman wrong. That was -- where you looked somewhat, you know, like you had a suspicious look, they'd single you out. But this, what of course, what she elaborated on was almost scary. She said when the people came into the Great Hall, other immigrants -- other immigrants had the audacity (that were upstairs already and came downstairs) said to the other immigrants, 'Don't

take your bags up there with you. You don't have to take them, don't worry about -- just leave 'em here. When you come back, they'll be here.' And they stole their little belongings, as little as they had. Other immigrants were stealing from one another. Wonderful, wonderful. Then start in the country with just -- literally, with the shirt on your back, and something like that. And fortunate, too, was the person who had a relative in this country. Exploitation was prolific. Let me give you an example of that. A person would look at the persons -- where they're heading for. And say, for instance, we're at Ellis Island. And maybe Hoboken is about ten miles from here, tops. And that person would say, 'Okay, you're going to Hoboken,' and they'd sell 'em a train ticket by way of Philadelphia. That's the way it went. People were ripping one another off. That's a terrible thing and --

LEVINE: Did you know about any of that, like, firsthand? Or did you read it, or,

ZJAWIN: No, but the person at that time elaborated on that. This was a,

LEVINE: Oh, who was giving the tour.

ZJAWIN: Yeah, this was a fact of life. Of course, I've brought many a group over to this beautiful place, because I enjoy it constantly, always. There's always something here for me. In fact, when I was a kid, the Statue of Liberty, you were allowed to go up into the torch. And I've done it once; I've done it a thousand times. That was, in a sense -- I loved climbing that ladder [Laughs].

LEVINE: You mean you could go as a visitor?

ZJAWIN: At that time in history, that torch was still open. You could go right up to the top,

LEVINE: And you could climb the ladder up the arm, inside the arm?

ZJAWIN: Yeah, right up into the end, absolutely. It was great. And then, of course, they figured it was the tensile strength – was being compromised by too much up and down, up and down. And it's sort of a freestanding arc; that arm like that. So they just – which I think was a good move, it was really -- there was really no need for that. And it was putting everybody in jeopardy, and why do that? So the crown, I thought, was sufficient. But I had the good fortune of climbing all the way to the top of that torch.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, what did they do? They allowed people to go up? I mean, you can't pass anybody,

ZJAWIN: No, no. I believe at that time they had like a little waiting station. And somebody went up and then they come down, and then somebody went up and somebody come down. And that's the way it went. Like I was just in the Statue recently, and I've noticed they put elevators in there, which is good too. But in the old days, if you got sick, baby, you had... [Laughs] I mean you might, you might meet your maker. Seventy feet, seven hundred feet up in the air, or something like that. So big improvements, of course, but it's like, the – these different people who I do occasionally bring over to this beautiful monument.

LEVINE: Tell me who you bring over.

ZJAWIN: Well, lots of times I have different cousins and sometimes friends of theirs. And other people who recommend me. They say 'Joey knows everything.' Which then, I know it sounds pompous. [Laughs] But, you know, I think we all suffer this syndrome. You can figure out everybody else's problems but you can't figure out your own. I don't know why that's so but it's so. And just for the grace of God or – if you believe in a god – that's, this is the way

it's done. You know, I guess in essence, I guess if you go to Yellowstone Park there's a guide that takes you through. So I'm the guide that takes you through.

LEVINE: But these are people coming through Europe that you're talking about.

ZJAWIN: Yes. And I have the good fortune of being bilingual, too. I speak Polish reasonably well, and I read it somewhat, and also write it somewhat. But basically understanding and speaking it, I'm reasonably good at that. And I think I told you, Miss Levine, once in Europe a gentleman said to me, 'Joe,' he said, 'you're born in America?' I said, 'Yes.' And this was all in Polish of course. And he said, 'You know, you speak better Polish than some of the Polish people here.' [Laughs] I said, 'You can thank my mother for that. Because she'd give you a shot in the head if you didn't get it right.' [Laughs] You know what I mean? So, of course, as you're a child growing up, believe it or not, I had this. And I – almost every kid growing up in America that came from a different nationality and spoke the language, you were a little reluctant to use it in America because you felt people would be making fun of you if you speak in a foreign tongue. Or this, 'Hey, you're in America, talk American,' or something to that effect. And sometimes they misconstrued it as if you're talking about them. So maybe in a way they were right to some degree. It's the, so you know, because you feel like you're an outsider when somebody is talking in another language. So I controlled that impulse whenever I was gonna speak Polish to Polish people. I'd make sure they all understood me. And when I spoke to English people, I made sure I spoke in English so everybody can understand me; so they can gauge me, whichever. You know, and so on.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father want you to hold on to some of the culture of Poland, or did they want you to become Americanized?

ZJAWIN: No. I'll tell ya, Mom and Dad were, they were unique in their own way. They tried so hard to become American. They didn't go to school, but we heard – and to best they could, they'd use English mostly in the house because they wanted to get on with it. They, we went to a Polish parochial school for a number of reasons. First of all, I think the word is called **ghetto**. And ghetto means people who gather into one place where they feel they can control their life, because they understand the question and they can give an answer. So that's why people gravitate to their own...So the fact that Mom and Pop, there was a language – [Noise on the tape, followed by the tape looping back and repeating Mr. Zjawin saying, "they feel they can control their life because they understand the question and they can give an answer. So that's why people gravitate to their own."]

END OF SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

ZJAWIN: So the fact that Mom and Pop – there was a language barrier. They figured they'd get us into a Catholic parochial Polish school, where we can learn both English and Polish. The Polish education that I received was very limited. When I say limited, not because they didn't want to give you more. That's – the curriculum went this way. The first two years, that means first grade and second grade, you had a half an hour of the Polish language. And if you compiled – and then you take the holidays and all these other days – it compou-- It comes down to really almost nothing. So if you put both years together, of the half-hour or some – I mean, it's a twenty-four hour day. The education might have come out to maybe five or six days, if you put all the half-hours together. But the thing that reinforced it was they did speak the Polish language at certain masses. And there was a lot of Polish radio programs in the day, and a lot of the neighbors that where we lived, some of them spoke Polish. So I -- it was reinforced, and this way – and I thank God 'til today. And I said, 'Gee, I wished I would've learned Spanish and the other languages, too.'

Because like I said before, if a person doesn't understand what you're saying, you're not communicating. 'Cause you can't always depend on hand, like a -- you give a signal with your hand as if you're hungry, put your hand to your mouth, maybe a person can relate to that or pretend you have a cup and you want to drink something, they can relate to that. But there's many more subjects you have to discuss and if you're not relating, things go belly up. And, you know, a word in some languages might mean something terrible in the English language. So you've got to be sort of aware of that, too. And be careful the way you use your language, because in another race they might be very highly offended. And you don't even know you're offending them! I think even the auto-makers started researching the names they gave their cars, because over here it might've sound okay.

In fact, one thing that broke my heart – when I was a little kid growing up, there was no television, incident--. We had radio. And it was enjoyed, too, because you had to use your imagination. What I remember or maybe some of the people who might be listening to this tape might; can relate to this. In them days there was a program called **The Lone Ranger**. And it seemed like he had a sidekick, and the name of the sidekick was Tonto. It was an Indian. And I thought that was great! But as I got older, I started finding out that it wasn't really a nice name. Because in the Spanish it almost, it comes close to 'stupid'. If you translate it -- **Tonto** -- into English, it comes out, 'Hey stupid, go get me this. Hey stupid, go get me that.' So even though – we not knowing that Tonto had such a connotation –it sounded like a nice Indian name. But it was not a nice Indian name.

See, so there's what I mean about words, you know. Choose 'em wisely. The benefits of growing up with a multiple – meaning Irish, Germans, some Russians, and black people – it had its benefits. Because why? You learned to adjust! It was absolutely divine, that adjustment. When you left

the house, you had to adjust to what was on the street! It wasn't like you were back in the old country, in your own little town or something, you know and that's it, you know? So your homes had to become bi-lingual, whether you liked it or not. And it was all of our benefits to be that way. It comes right back down to it, one single word – we're not communicating if we don't understand one another. That's where we're at.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you talk about your work life that brought you close to these two islands?

ZJAWIN: Yes, okay. And I did work on the Central Railroad of New Jersey. That's, it's one of the monuments today, also,. And I'd wanna bring something to everyone's attention. Maybe they're aware of it, maybe they're not aware of it. The road that comes in, Johnson Avenue, there's a – cobblestones. They're humongous and they're strong, and so on. And how these cobblestones got to be there and in the many other streets of the United States? They were brought over from England, Scotland, and them parts of the world. And the reason they were brought over here is very simple! The ships that used to take the products from the colonies in them days were heavily ladened [sic]. On their return trip to America, they weren't bringing too much merchandise, but they needed ballast. And these stones were used as ballast to keep these ships from flipping over in the waves. And what do you do with these things? Well they come -- pile them up. And then somebody thought it would be a good idea to make a road out of it. And today, you still have this beautiful road. Will probably be here longer than the Mt. Himalaya [sic] will be in existence, because them Belgian Blocks are something else. I know. I got hit in the head with one, one day. [Laughs throughout] Kids are kids, you know. We're throwing rocks around – bong! But I survived it.

And then of course, in that, in this particular area of Jersey City, at the terminal, a lot of things happened. Of course, the Second World War was a monstrosity. I guess people's feelings were hurt. And the net result was Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember exactly where I was at the day I got, I heard that bomb – that they bombed Pearl Harbor. It was a Sunday, and I was in front of my house on thirty-three Vincent Street. And it was a window on this house on Thirty-three; there was three windows. Two of them I'd seen open at time but this one; I'd never seen it open. But that day, I did. And the lady's name was Mrs. Hatfield – opened the window and hollered to Mrs. Macanty, 'Mrs. Macanty, did you hear what happened?' And Mrs. Macanty said, 'No, no. What happened?' Mrs. Hatfield said, 'The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor!'

Well, I was a kid about ten-years old and I remember my mom had pearls she wore around her neck. And I remember my father had a garden and he had rose bushes, and they had Japanese beetles that used to come and eat these rose bushes. And my dad said to us children (there was eight of us), 'When you see the beetle on the plant, take it and throw it into this little bucket.' And we did that. And when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, I relate that these beetles were coming to steal my mother's pearls. That's the way you are when you're a kid. 'Cause I said, 'Pearl Harbor? Hmmm. Japanese? Hmmm. Beetles!' [Laughs] But of course, I was – I was off-base there but--. Still, that's the way I tied it together. I tried to protect my mother's pearls. So I say, 'Go give me a break.' [Holding back laughter].

And then of course, my brothers all wound up in the military. Walter in the Air Force – served in England. Eddy was in the Marine Corps – he served in the Pacific. Teddy was in the Navy – he (I believe his ship even got torpedoed up in the North Atlantic) he was in the Navy. And I had another brother Leo, he was in the Army during the Korean War. And I also was in the Marine Corps. And I was in the Korean War, also. So my mom had five

stars in the window, let's put it that way. She did her job well. And I buy the ad, it was a pleasure to – I never looked at it as I'm doing America a big deal. I thought this was the way it's supposed to be, you know, this is your – take care of you. No, I'm not out to hurt nobody. I don't care what their nationality – I would rather adjust and see where you're going from and maybe we can find some common ground. But apparently, you know, we're selfish in our own way, in somehow or another.

Thank God for public parks. For instance, the Statue of Liberty. Whoever comes here, you're just one of the people. You're not – you're not any particular brand, you're not a nationality, you're not a religion, you're just another person coming to make a visit. So, I'm all for more public places where people could assemble. [Laughs] So we can all leave it behind, you know. Don't bring your ethnic background or your religion with you because for some reason they seem to be the most, worst stumbling blocks to us as human beings. We just can't get past how wonderful we are. Meaning we're of a particular race or a particular religion. I think there's a, you know, an old saying that, 'When you blow your horn, you're usually at the other end of it.' Or something like that [Laughs]. So, you know, temper it like that. You know, temper it with wisdom.

LEVINE: It seems like your religion and your ethnicity is a big part of your life. How do you put that together with what you just said?

ZJAWIN: Well, how I do it is very simple. When I leave the house, I leave it at home. I don't take it with me. I don't elaborate what my ethnic background is. I don't elaborate on what my religious background is. They're there, but I do not pronounce that. And when I visit like Europe or Egypt or any place at all, I try to come as – I prefer if the person's --. Not so much for my safety but – let me give you an example. If you're introduced to someone and the person said, 'This is Mrs. Levine'. Well you say, okay. But if the person

would say to you, 'This is Dr. Levine,' you think you have to come up a little more to match this person's intellectual. And the net result is when you preface it by **you're an American** or something to that effect, they sort of look at you as if, 'Huh'. Or, you know, 'Measure up to this guy,' or some other thing. In other words, you intimidate people sometimes by saying what you are. It can happen this way. If you had the good fortune of having the benefits of these instructions, meaning the religious instruction.

And like our, I keep saying our beautiful country, and I mean it. in a sense that we have our faults and all that. But even with the monstrosity that befell us, we're still ready, like, to forgive 'em. And there's, like, there's a two-edged sword here. We want to forgive them because we don't want to dilly-dally too much in nonsense. We want to go on with our life, build another bridge, build another building, create more beautiful medicines. And then we're doing like children do – we're fighting. I think Barbara Streissand's song should be sung in every church in the world! Every day, people who need people are the luckiest people in the world! Be more like children than children, and on, and on, and on it goes. And of course we had this magnificent bridge, it's called the Verrazano. It wasn't around in the days when I heard these beautiful words.

And of course this was from a nun's also. This, she said to us like this, 'Children, yes, you have faith and believe in God, but you must understand this. God works through us – he doesn't come and build a bridge. He gives you the inspiration and then go on with it. Because the bridge is that your daddy is going to take you for a ride today in the car. These are built by people. They've been inspired to do this.' Somebody will say, 'Oh, yeah, well they got paid for it.' Well aren't we lucky, that there are some people who have the talent, that at least you can buy it? She said, "Pretend you go to the store and you got money. But there's no bread to buy. What a problem. So, then the store has bread and they say, 'How much is the

bread?' They say fifty dollars. And 'Oh, that's a lot.' But [Sighs] you have to part with the fifty, because at least you got the bread." The main thing is you know you--. Sometimes we exploit one another something terrible, but the end result you have to go on. You have to survive. You have to have water.

I just had the good experience of coming through Egypt, about a month ago. And, of course, it's a country unto itself. And I thought to myself while I was there, what a – what a job our President Bush has. Because it's a different culture, it's a different point of view, and they look at life differently. We look at it one way, they look at it another. Whether that not to men--you know, 'East is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet.' I don't know how we're going to do this but I keep him in my prayers because he's got a tough nut to grind there, because nobody wants to yield. Ask yourself this question: If you were of, say, a Muslim persuasion, are you ready to kneel down five times a day and pray to Allah? And this is what some of the requirements if you belong to that po- and if you really are honestly fervent in your religion, this is required of you. And if you don't fulfill it then you are not a good Muslim. It's just that simple. Like in Catholicism, most of the time they'd say you must go to confession at least once a year. And if you don't fulfill it, then you're not a good practicing Catholic.

So it's really, it's – let me compare it to a stop sign. You can either go through the stop sign or stop. It's up to you. The stop sign more or less says to you, 'We're going on your word of honor.' When you see it, you're gonna stop. A lot of people go through it; cop catches 'em – the same thing like the good Lord. Now what? How do you get yourself out of this mess? But going back one more time to Central Railroad terminal. I remember in particular – of course there was, them days there were steam engines. They were not diesels like we have today or electric engine. They were big, giant things. You had to see 'em to believe it. The wheels on these trains

towered maybe eight foot high, and they had big axles. And steam hissing, and all sorts of noises coming out. And it was almost as if it was a living dinosaur when you looked at them trains. And I --. Little did I know, it was on track one in the Central Railroad terminal -- is where I got on a train to go for my Basic Training down in Parris Island, South Carolina. Little did I know. I said, 'Gee!' I couldn't believe it. When I was leaving, I thought it was like Twilight Zone. I said, 'No, this happens to others. This doesn't happen to me.' But it was a good experience.

I think I mentioned before, the beautiful part of joining into the military (the United States Marine Corps) was I --whether you liked it or not, you had to become self-sufficient. Every bird must fly on its own wings. It's just that simple. "As much as Mommy loves you, she can't put you on your back when you're ready to fly, Sonny." So you had to do it! And I've seen a many a guy that didn't make it. They got down to Parris Island, they started out with a hundred in the platoon. And you -- when we graduated there were seventy-two of us left. He had to eliminate them because they -- it's not that they didn't measure up. Maybe they were better in some other form of life or some other occupation. So I felt very proud of it, at the fact that I was -- I was accepted; even if it were to cost me my life. I wasn't gonna back off. This was for my parent's sake and for -- I guess in a way too, you wanna show off to the girls, you know. You made it [Both laugh]. That's the way it was, you know. That's where -- the nature of the beast, you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Well did you have any contact with people who were coming from Ellis Island? Or did, or you weren't -- were you working on the railroad when people were coming?

ZJAWIN: Actually, no. There was -- I never -- if I did make contact with 'em, I didn't realize they were.

LEVINE: You didn't notice they were,

ZJAWIN: Yeah. They were just people coming through. Because that was a big disembark--. They -- they brought them from here, from Ellis Island over to Jersey City, to Central Railroad terminal. And most of your immigrants -- this is where it was, you know, the first time they really truly were on the United States of America, not on an island. They were on that particular piece of land -- I can't honestly say, because -- because everybody looked a little raggedy in them days. So maybe some of these people I'd seen coming through with just the shirt on their back and like these baskets made of straw, I might -- I might've rubbed shoulders with them and never even know it. Just thought they were people from New York going down the shore or something like that. It was no inkling of it. And, you, if you did see somebody like that from another country, they tended to go into a shell. 'Cause they didn't want to jeopardize. Like, you're liable to talk and they can't respond and they don't know who you are. So there was a fear of going back. In fact, I want to talk about that fear a moment. One day, I brought a group of people over here to the Ellis Island and the, on the second floor where people were interrogated. And there's like a sort of a podium there. And I says to a few of my cousins --

LEVINE: And they were from Poland?

ZJAWIN: They were from Poland, yeah. And I said, 'I want you to sit on them wooden benches. And you don't move until I call you. And I may not call you verbally, I might just call you with my finger. It's [not understood].' And they sat there -- there was four of them -- and I pretended I was an inspector for the United States Government. And I lingered and I lingered, and I lingered... and they sat there maybe ten, fifteen minutes. And I didn't make no motion towards them at all. And then eventually I sort of put my glasses

down on my nose and I looked at them long and hard. And then I looked back at what I was doing, pretended I was writing. And after about ten minutes, I pointed to one of them. And then I took my finger and went like this. And that person -- and when they got closer, I s--, 'Stop there. Stop there! Don't go no further.' And then I went back to writing and I wrote about (I was pretending I was writing). I was trying their patience, is what I was trying to do.

And then I'd say to this girl (Isa was her name) I says -- without giving her the dignity of looking at her -- I'd say, 'What's your name?' And she'd say, 'Isa.' I said, 'I can't hear you! What's your name?' She said, 'Is- Isa.' 'What's your last name?' 'P-, Pier-, Pierchark.' 'What?' 'Pierchak' 'Paycheck?' 'Pierchark. Okay, Isa Paycheck. [sound of writing] Go sit down.' And then to the next one. So after we got done with this, I says to the group, I said, 'Anything happen?' They said, 'Uncle Joe, we thought we were gonna die. Honest to God, you frightened us. We felt as if this is the real McCoy. This is, you know, your -- our life was in your hands. Whether we stay or we're going to be shipped out of this place.' 'Cause I tried to put on, like, the real McCoy. And it worked. I sold the package to these four people.

'Cause like the one said to me, 'Joe-, Uncle Joe, I didn't know if you were really an inspector or whether you were just pretending, or whether you brought us here to deport us, or what!' Ah, fear. Fear can be a terrible thing. You do stupid things, too, under fear like that. And I simulated that situation to a few other people. And believe it or not, it sold. And, of course, like Europe in particular, Communism and Poland in that particular time of era. Now, how can I best compare it? Somebody comes into your house and takes over. That's exactly what Communism was. Somebody came into your country and they're telling you how to live your life. Luckily, it's a gone thing and all that sort of stuff. But the remnants are still there.

And I think, Mrs. Levine, as we were walking up to your office, I made mention of something and you concurred with me. Because you also had the experience and it had to do with Auschwitz. And when I walked into this building, it brought back a lot of memories. Whew! So how did these people do it? Death would have been preferable, really, you know. It's like – I had a mother-in-law who went through the gas chamber – she passed on – and the other fam-- member. This is my wife's side of the family. 'Cause they immigrated eventually – my wife did anyway, and my brother-in-law, from the town called Brodnica, in northern Poland. And they found their way into the United States. Teddy, my brother-in-law, he was into the military. And the fact that he was helping with the American cause, they granted him citizenship in the United States, American. By that, he eventually brought his sisters over. And one of the sisters I eventually married.

But I know their history in Europe. He was in the concentration camps also and also my wife. I don't know if she was actually in a concentration camp, but she was deported and she was used as slave labor. So then these people come to the United States, and they're the most beautiful people in the world. Not because they're my relatives – you very seldom hear them even saying a peep about what went on. Her mother went shopping when she was a little girl – this was back in 1942 – and they never came back. That means, when the Gestapo and the -- were in that particular town, they -- if you were out after curfew, that was it. There was no excuse and she was out after curfew. And then that was it. They took her from northern Poland to southern Poland and that was the end of her. That's the way it goes. So these people that come here -- like I've had that my wife, and numerous other relatives of mine, I've always brought 'em into the Statue of Liberty. This is America, you know. This is like the, the doorway to the United States. We all know that. And of course, only until you go away

from America and when you come back, you realize what you got goin' here. So.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a nice place to end, unless you have something you'd like to say in closing about the Statue, about Ellis, about your --

ZJAWIN: Yeah. I, well I, like, you know, just in keeping with the situation. There was a little situation that developed between our country and France where a lot of people maligned France for not siding with us in this last particular episode, the Iraqi War. And little -- I said to myself, people were belittling France and I have no connection with France. I'm not a champion of their cause, I'm just saying it the way it is. If you read the history books, we owe France a debt of gratitude that was -- can never ever be repaid. Because if it wasn't for France -- back before our Revolutionary War -- there would have been no United States, because they actually kept England at bay. There was two brothers that were the commanders in the English military -- one was in the Army and one was in the Navy. And they were called Cromwells [sic]. And the final battle down in Yorktown, Virginia -- when the French blocked the British fleet from reinforcing their troops -- the admiral of the British military said these words, 'It is over.' They sent word to King George, 'The battle has been lost.' That means America was now in the beginning of the United States of America. We owe France an apology.

LEVINE: They also were responsible for making the Statue of Liberty.

ZJAWIN: Yeah, that's it. And that's where this all came from. And they were, they loved us. And they still love us but, you know. France see, it's a culture. And it's got—it's got time behind it, meaning thousands of years. We're a br-- new country. What are we, three hundred years old? So in essence, it's like a kid trying to tell an uncle or a father what to do. And we, we just -- let the kid grow up, so to speak. And you know, try to understand 'em and

all that. Like in today's world, we see – we can see it in all of our major cities. We have a monstrous problem on our hand, and that's illegal people. Coming illegally into the country. It's just, this – we really don't know what to do about this. The President of Mexico, aptly named Fox, had the audacity to say to President Bush, 'Make them all legal!' We got about three million people that are illegal in the United States. He had the audacity to 'make it legal'. How about the people from the other countries? Come on, get real. You know? I heard something the other day that the amount of money that leaves the United States, it's into the billions – of illegal workers working here and sending the money back. I'm not finding fault in this because it's a work force and we do need a work force.

But I gotta know where you're at, pal. Suppose we go to war, where do I send the draft notice? So, it's like you want to be here, but you want to be there. The second generation, maybe they lose that ethnic background. But here's a good example. I don't think my children – I have, I had two children. One passed away but the other one, very marginal. And if she should have children, I'm sure her children won't speak a word of Polish. And maybe it's rightly so, because you are in the United States. We need a, the, I guess the, in a sense it's good to be multilingual. The pope is an excellent example of that; he can talk to almost anybody. So you know, it comes down to again. If the key fits the lock, the door will open.

If the language barriers can be broken down, maybe you find out that – you know. I think it's – and to put it in a nutshell, I think we don't consider one another's feelings too often. We just do – we're impatient with one another. Get it over with, get it done, get it out of my way and then what? It takes some-- a catalyst. Even now. I read in the paper -- even with this monstrosity that broke loose, the Tsunami. There are till -- still some groups over there are still goin' to war! Still knockin' one another off! That wave came and knocked two mi-- and they still wanna do a number on one

another. But back to the United States for a minute and –. And I thank you, Mrs. Levine, for having me in and how our chance meeting was unusual too. When I went to buy the tickets for these people I was bringin' to the Island, I mentioned the fact that I worked here at the Central Railroad terminal. And this lady at that time almost went ballistic. She, 'Oh, you gotta talk to Mrs. Levine! You must talk to Mrs. Levine!' She gave me your phone number, and I left it on your tape. And then you got back to me, and here we are today, you know. That's the way it goes, you know? And I, I want to thank you so much for having me in! And, you know,

LEVINE: Well, thank you! And I want to say that -- more than the fact that you worked at the New Jersey Terminal, which was what brought you into this interview -- I think the interview is particularly interesting because of the things you said about different ethnic groups being compatible and being cooperative instead of abusive,

ZJAWIN: It's the fear of the unknown, really. You know? Yeah, I had a good teacher that put it the best. She said when she had any students and the one that was shy back is the one she would concentrate on. Because she said usually the person that shies away doesn't understand what's going on. The one that's forthright and comes and does it, they don't need the help, you know? It's like the – what I do – this is what she told me – she said, "What I do, is I try to do it discreetly. I don't do it in front of the class. And I say for instance, Joey's having a hard time with something. I'd say, 'Joey, do you need help with that?' I wouldn't do that. What I would do is, like, I'd – I'd – pass --you know -- as a teacher walks up and down a classroom. I'd put a little note and I'd put it on a person's desk. And I say, 'Please stay after the bell, I'd like to speak with you for a few moments.' And then I'd ask them, 'What, where's the stumbling block? What's got you confused? And maybe I'll explain it once or twice more to you.' I try to avoid making the fool of the person in front of his peers, because peer pressure is terrible."

Terrible!' And in a man's world it's the worst. Because – I think the Spanish have a word for it, it's called **macho**. Macho means, 'at all costs you're not gonna take me down'. That's the way it goes, you know? I think maybe we've all seen these movies at one time or another. There was a series going around at one time it was called *Zorro* and he was a crime fighter in Mexico and them parts of the world. He rode a horse and he gave to the, he took from the rich and gave to the poor – on that order. And whenever he had a duel with somebody with swords, they'd always use the glove. One guy slapped the other guy in the face with his glove and then he'd pick a place to have a duel. Just like Hamilton and Burr. What a, -- what a --. When you think back [Laughs], that was in vogue in them days.

It was outlawed and these guys, they – they –they were so, they were so angry at one another they found – even though it was outlawed, but the, so what? So is robbin' banks outlawed too, but they still do it [Laughs]. And he was, he was – I read his, the biography. And the biographer said like this – he didn't really want to duel, he was hoping that it didn't, you know. In the beginning they were angry – I'm talking about Hamilton now – he didn't really want, he said. I think he almost took the bullet, because he wasn't up to killing somebody. But the other guy was and that's the way it goes. And of course, like every, all good things must come to an end. And this looks like this is one of them, yeah.

LEVINE: We're at the end of this tape, so we're gonna close here. And I thank you very much...

ZJAWIN: Okay, it's been my pleasure.

LEVINE: ...for a lovely interview. And this is Janet Levine, signing off.

EI-1373/ZJAWIN

END OF INTERVIEW