

EI-1384

ZIMRA PELED

BIRTHDATE: May 28, 1927

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 78

DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 5, 2005

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Ellis Island Oral History Recording Studio

RUNNING TIME: 30:02

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MARY DISTINTI

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

Note: Mrs. Zimra Peled and her husband are residents of Israel where Mrs. Peled (and probably Mr. Peled) grew up. Mrs. Peled was born on Ellis Island to Jewish parents who then moved to Israel shortly after her birth. Mrs. Peled's family was originally composed of Russian immigrants who came to the United States through Canada.

LEVINE: Okay today is July 5th 2005. I'm here in the Ellis Island studio with a woman who was born here on Ellis Island and has lived her life in Israel. She's here with her husband visiting and, her name, when she was born, was Zimra...

PELED: Flex.

LEVINE: Flex. And her married name is-

PELED: Zimra Peled.

LEVINE: Okay, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would start by saying that, that what your birth date is.

PELED: What my birthday is?

LEVINE: Your birth date.

PELED: Date.

LEVINE: The date you were born.

PELED: 28th May, 1927.

LEVINE: Okay and your mother's name?

PELED: Dvora Flix, Dvora Tipperman, maiden name Tipperman.

LEVINE: Oh. Oh wait a minute, now Tipperman is-

PELED: Maiden name, before she was married.

LEVINE: Oh Okay. And her first name, how do you spell that?

PELED: Dvora, D-V-O-R-A, Dvora.

LEVINE: Okay, and your father's name?

PELED: Zeichiary [ph]. It's Zeichiary in America.

LEVINE: Okay.

PELED: And Flex.

LEVINE: Flex. Okay, and so can you tell me how it was that you came, your mother came to be here when you were born, at the time of your birth?

PELED: I know that my mother came first to the United States from Canada. She has a visa from Canada, she was here, she came 1923, and 1924, she went to Israel. She was a member of a Zionist movement here in the United States and she went to Israel 1924. I still don't understand why, she met my father in Israel, he came also from the United States to Israel, but he came 1921 to Israel. And he had a degree from Columbia University. He, they came from very different backgrounds. He came from a very wealthy family who had commerce in between Russia and the United States, for years. She came from an ultra orthodox family which came from the Ukraine to the United States and her father was a Rabbi. So, but when she came to Israel, she was a Zionist, non-religious, and that's how I knew her. And I never met my grandfather who lived here. The only ones that I knew while I was a child, or an adolescent was my grandmother who came to visit with us, and one of my aunts. But the family was a big family here. When first I came to the United States it was 1956.

Unidentified

Man: '67.

PELED: '67, yeah.

LEVINE: That was your first time back?

Unidentified

Man: Yeah.

PELED: Back and I met the whole family. And I told you already that I was very thankful that cooperated and let me here (laughs).

LEVINE: Well that's actually quite a statement, say why, why you fell that way?

PELED: Because, Israel at that time was a very challenging country. I was part of a really leading group in the development of Israel's independence. My parents were idealists, were pioneers who when back to work in farming which wasn't traditional Jewish profession. I grew up in the nature, knowing my country, loving my country, taking part in everything that was going on, being a part of the elite group of Israel youth, and I think that it's a privilege. If I would be here like my cousins, maybe that I would be reached, maybe that I would not be reached. I have all kinds of relatives here, but their foci of life are money, achieving a better stand out of materialistic life, I don't find that they have the same challenges that I had experienced with life. And I am talking now about, you know, a long life already.

LEVINE: Well I guess if your mother and father had stayed here, would they have been the idealists, and get things here...

PELED: No, no, no. They came to Israel because they were idealist. They, and I emphasize that they came from very different backgrounds. I could understand that my mother was the oldest in her family, and she might want to leave the family because the burden of an immigrant family was on her shoulders. But that wasn't the case of my father, not at all. And probably if he would stay here, he would become professor at the university of something like that. And he became a farmer, and he said, but that was the highest state was in Israel that you could achieve at that time.

LEVINE: Well, what was his profession, what was his training?

PELED: As a historian in a, I think literature or something like that. He spoke, read, and you know, in all ten languages. And he was a poor farmer (all laught).

LEVINE: Well you can't do everything well right? So you really grew up and were you living on a Kabutz [ph]?

PELED: No in a musavah [ph]. If you know what that is.

LEVINE: No, say what that is.

PELED: It's, it's a kind of private farms. Not that big as you have here. We had an orchard, an orange orchard, vegetable, you know, cows, a few cows. Life was very, very strict you know; we didn't have a lot of money, we weren't poor- we never felt poor because it was a life that my parents- it was their choice. But if I compare, you know, to have a sweet once a week was something very special and you know, we ate what we grew in the farm and that was nice. And we enjoyed nature.

LEVINE: So how about...

PELED: We were members of a youth movement, and you know, all the activities. And we were part, since, you know, the age of 12, in the haganah [ph], if you know what it is.

LEVINE: (inaudible).

PELED: Do you know what it is?

LEVINE: No say it for the tape.

PELED: A, how would I define haganah?

Unidentified

Man: It was the underground militia of the Jews in Israel, in Palestine of that time; a kind of a secret underground military force.

PELED: And later, after high school, I was a member of Indpelmah [ph] which was the active part of the haganah.

LEVINE: Ahah.

PELED: There were about in that time 2000.

LEVINE: So in other words you could describe your life as one of service to Israel in many ways.

Unidentified

Man: Yes.

PELED: Yes. Living beyond, living beyond the needs of your-

LEVINE: Own person.

Unidentified

Man: We belong to the generation of the War of Independence in Israel.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

Unidentified

Man: That's the thing.

LEVINE: Now have you had, you didn't have any contact with, did you have contact with, I should ask, your family in those intervening years?

PELED: Only, only some letters that I wrote in Hebrew, but they went to Hebrew school. But I must say something about my mother's family, not my father's family, because my father's family, they were to start with, (inaudible). Two of them died, and he had one sister in Poland, and she had one daughter, and they were part of the Holocaust, you know, they disappeared. The only one who remained from this family was my aunt's husband, who was a colonel in the Polish army, and after the war I had caught up with him. He then remarried a friend of theirs that was also a survivor, and they went to Australia.

LEVINE: But your mother's family...

PELED: My mother's family, the whole family is here. And my mother was very close to her family, especially to a brother of her's, the difference between them was less than a year in age. He lived in Canada, and every week there was a letter going back and forth, a letter, not an email message, a full letter, some pages, in Yiddish. And they would right to each other. And his family is still in Canada, he is not alive, but his wife, but we were close to them.

LEVINE: I see. Do you know by any chance why your mother and her family went to Canada? Was it easier to get into the United States or they meant to stay in Canada?

PELED: I don't know. I wasn't told.

Unidentified

Man: I heard the stories from your uncle.

PELED: From Nate.

Unidentified

Man: From Nate- the second brother of the family. They came to Canada because it was easier probably, and we gave you the document of immigration from Canada to the United States. She was carrying a Russian pass port, and it was, the visa was issued at the Russian Consulate in Montreal. So I think that- and one uncle remained-

PELED: No two, one in the United States in Detroit and one was in Vinson.

Unidentified

Man: In Vinson which is the suburb, the Canadian suburb of Detroit. And, no- they had an uncle...

PELED: No they had two uncles here.

MR.

PELED: In Newark.

PELED: No in New York.

MR.

PELED: In New York?

PELED: In New York.

MR.

PELED: Who already were...

PELED: Citizens.

MR.

PELED: Not only citizens, they had a little bit of money, and they were the support of the whole clan. They, first of all, he is the reference here.

LEVINE: Oh he's the sponsor.

MR.

PELED: (Inaudible) Depermont. And the other one in the family is caller Uncle Mayor, uncle Myor, and they had money and they supported the whole family.

PELED: At that time, you know, families were very close together. I don't that it's now the case in the United States.

LEVINE: That families are close? I don't know, I guess just from this experience of interviewing some are.

PELED: Some are close?

LEVINE: Yes I'm sure, yeah, even though they are distant, physically distant.

PELED: Why am saying it because we are the anchor of the family, although we live in Israel. Everybody is related to us and we brought together many members of the family.

MR.

PELED: Third generation.

PELED: Third generation, but they...

MR.

PELED: Even didn't know each other.

PELED: Didn't know each other, but you know, everybody, or almost everybody comes to Israel. And when they are coming to Israel, they are coming to us and they are staying with us, and they are hearing all kinds of stories. So that's how. And when we first came to the United States, we came, it was a glorious gift because (inaudible) was a general in the Israeli Army after the Six Days War, so it was something. You know we were moving...

MR.

PELED: For the family.

PELED: For the family you know. So we were moving from one to the other. And we know all of them, so we brought them together.

LEVINE: Oh, well that's a nice roll to play.

MR.

PELED: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well now, did your mother ever say, or your father, anything about Ellis Island?

PELED: No. No. They even didn't tell me that I was born here. And today when I was here, I could understand why.

MR.

PELED: You know we saw the movie.

LEVINE: Oh good.

PELED: I could understand- no and I saw the pictures. There are no smiling faces there, everybody is sad. And to be here, pregnant, giving birth to a child here, a first child, was not a joke. And probably it was a very traumatic experience for my mother, who was the strong person in the family. That's one reason. Second is my suspicion. They were idealists, and that's why they came to Israel. And I don't know if they didn't intend to go back to the United States when my mother was pregnant, and to stay here with the family. And it was a kind, as far as I can reconstruct it, a kind of betrayal in the Zionist idealism. And maybe they get two factors together, made them, you know, to cross the line and not to tell me, they even told me all kinds of stories, like for instance, when we were married, in my ...

MR.

PELED: Marriage certificate, place of birth was written Dansig [ph]

PELED: Dansig. And I never knew exactly, I suspected, I never knew exactly where I was born. Only when I got my birth certificate...

MR.

PELED: Somebody of the family when we came here, one of the family told you. That's how we came to the birth certificate. They told you "Zimra you were born in the United States."

PELED: They never, you know, it was probably a traumatic experience for them.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, so-

PELED: But now that I saw the-

LEVINE: Now you understand why. (All laugh)

PELED: I had the (inaudible) go by.

LEVINE: Well you know they do call it "Island of Hope, Island of tears."

MR.

PELED: Many tears, many tears.

LEVINE: Yes there were a lot of tears too. But let me just make sure I have it clear, your mother and father actually met in Israel.

PELED: Yeah.

LEVINE: Then your mother emigrated to Canada.

PELED: No!

MR.

PELED: No! They emigrated from Russia to Canada in early '20s; immediately after the war, the First World War. And part of them crossed the boarder to the States. And then they started, one brought they other. And from here, her parents went to Israel, to Palestine.

PELED: Each of them by himself.

MR.

PELED: So it's...

LEVINE: So they met there.

PELED: In Israel.

LEVINE: In Israel.

MR.

PELED: I think that her father was a passenger either in the first or the second class of the boat, whereas her mother was probably on the third one.

LEVINE: You mean coming here.

PELED: Yeah, yeah. They were both, they had a lot of money. They lost it, in 1929 they lost everything.

LEVINE: Oh really.

MR.

PELED: In the Depression.

PELED: The Depression. But they had a lot of money.

LEVINE: Okay so they both came here thinking, what, how, you reconstructed why you think they came here when they came?

PELED: Back?

LEVINE: Yeah, I mean to this country.

PELED: It's my...

MR.

PELED: Guess.

PELED: Guess, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PELED: My guess is, so called—(inaudible)

LEVINE: Okay well that's good, understandable.

PELED: They never would admit, or tell me, that they betrayed their Zionist idealism, trying to get back to the United States. What I know for certain is that they, before I was born, my mother was pregnant...

MR.

PELED: First time.

PELED: First time, and she lost her first child. My father was a spoiled rich person who couldn't, you know, be good in physical tasks, which was the most prestigious...

LEVINE: In Israel.

PELED: Status in Israel. My mother was excellent worker, and my father was well educated. My mother, like many in those days, had very basic education, talk intelligent, very rigid, and very in the fighting woman. So if I bring together everything, I don't think that the match was excellent, I don't think that Israel was excellent for them.

MR.

PELED: It was very difficult.

PELED: Difficult for them, you know, they couldn't support each other in that situation. They decided as far as I can imagine, to go back. Now they would never admit it, they would never tell it to me, because they raised me as a Zionist, as an idealist, so that's my guess but I am not sure about it.

LEVINE: And then you would also speculate that they were here for a while and said, "no we want-"...No?

MR.

PELED: No the problem is, why was she born here on Ellis Island and not in a New York hospital?

LEVINE: Well you would assume because they were being detained here?

MR.

PELED: I think so.

PELED: I think so.

MR.

PELED: There is no other reason, otherwise she would have been taken to a hospital in New York, no?

LEVINE: The only thing I can think of is if, you know, if they had just arrived...

MR.

PELED: Arrived...

LEVINE: And your mother was about to give birth...

MR.

PELED: Yeah, although I saw that in the exhibition, I saw that the same birth certificate of somebody who was born here. So probably...

LEVINE: Yes well according to the Librarian there, one thousand five-hundred births took place here. So it would depend on the timing I would think, if they had just arrived- there were facilities. On the other hand if they were being detained that would be something else.

MR.

PELED: No the problem, really the enigma is, they lived here, they went from here and they, both of them, you see, she had, she was legal here, she had a visa

PELED: And my father followed her.

MR.

PELED: Maybe...

LEVINE: They were here for deportation for some reason.

MR.

PELED: Maybe that the visa expired.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MR.

PELED: Because they weren't American citizens. Maybe because-

PELED: About my father I don't know.

MR.

PELED: No but your mother you see-

PELED: I know only about my mother.

MR.

PELED: They came here, and why, it was April 1923, so maybe the visa expired after, I don't know, and they thought they would be able to use the visa, came here, and the officer in the emigration said "Op, hold on. You don't have a valid visa." This is a possibility. And then go back.

PELED: So we don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah. That's possible

MR.

PELED: That's what we are trying, that's why we want very much to see the documents of the ships. I talk to them, and she said that, we have to come and they have an index of names and I look...

LEVINE: Well at least you can get in there and you can search.

MR.

PELED: She said there are no problems- self service.

LEVINE: Okay well I wish you luck. Okay well is there anything else about your birth here at Ellis Island that, anything-

PELED: No.

MR.

PELED: Don't you have documents of the hospital?

LEVINE: I am not aware of those documents if they have them. You know this place is kind of abandoned, I don't know if you were aware of that.

MR.

PELED: Yeah I know. It's just recently-

LEVINE: I mean it was as though one day people picked up and left and left everything just as though they went out for coffee you know (both laugh). And then it was pillaged and plundered for some years before it was made to be part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. So I'm not sure exactly, I'm not the best person to ask, you know Jeff would know that too.

MR.

PELED: Maybe that this can be a source of knowledge you know. If you have a Zimreska [ph] and if you, you find that the hospital has any kind of registration, just email us. And we'll try...

LEVINE: Oh, okay. I'd be happy to do that.

MR.

PELED: Okay.

LEVINE: In fact I know somebody working on all the hospital, I'll ask about that, yeah, okay.

MR.

PELED: Because I think that here, this can be the only source of any information. We'll go there to find out about the transportation, how did they come and if they were deported, not immediately, because I don't think they would send a baby of a week back on the boat, but maybe after, I don't know, two months, three months, something like that.

PELED: I don't know. The fact is that I met all my aunts except for one uncle. I met everybody, nobody spoke about it.

MR.

PELED: No but we met them thirty years ago.

PELED: Yeah, okay but they never, never spoke about it.

MR.

PELED: It was a kind of a...

LEVINE: A family secret?

MR.

PELED: Secret yeah.

LEVINE: A family secret. Because it was somehow, you know embarrassing.

MR.

PELED: Ashamed, I think.

LEVINE: Yeah, shame.

MR.

PELED: Shame.

LEVINE: Shame to have been-

MR.

PELED: Imprisoned, so called.

PELED: Yeah.

LEVINE: Right you know there are some people...

MR.

PELED: I would have been proud of that (laughs).

LEVINE: You know, it could be the difference, we're talking about your father's family mainly in this country, right, in Brooklyn?

PELED: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you know, there are people, it was mainly, as you saw in the film, the steerage passengers who came through here. Now some people are still to this day, embarrassed by having come through here because it meant that you that you were, you know, lower class whatever.

MR.

PELED: Okay so that's an explanation

LEVINE: So that is a partial element that, you know, you wouldn't admit to having come with the unwashed in the, you know, whatever. Well I'm delighted that you came by and I thank you very much.

PELED: Thank you.

MR.

PELED: Thank you.

LEVINE: And we'll have this now. Now if you sign this release form and then I'll send you a copy of the tape if you'd like to have it.

PELED: Oh Okay.

LEVINE: You'll know what's here at Ellis Island. Okay I've been speaking with Zimra Flex Peled, who came here, or who was born here in 1927. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.