

EDITH POMPER
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: STEVEN MICKLOVIC
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

AGE: 7

SHIP: ARABIC
PORT: SOUTHAMPTON
RESIDENCES:
? POLAND: OSTRÓWA MAZOWIECKA
? US: NEW YORK; LINDENHURST, LI; NY

LEVINE: Today is May 15th, 2006 and I'm here at Spring Tree Walk in Sun -Sun - I always want to say sunshine.

POMPER: Sunrise.

LEVINE: Sunrise - Sunrise.

POMPER: That's a date I was born on?

LEVINE: I believe you were born 1915.

POMPER: Could be. 1915.

LEVINE: 191-- You don't know you exact birth date?

POMPER: No. [pause] ----ember. I'm not pretty sure of that date. My mother thinks I was born -- October 15th because she decided according to the holidays. So I was in the middle of a certain holiday, that --that's when I was born. They -- we didn't have birth certificates- never had one and my mother had no doctor to tell me either. Must have been the midwife that didn't talk English at all. Nothing.

LEVINE: Where were you born?

POMPER: I was born in Poland.

LEVINE: Do you know where in Poland?

POMPER: What, dear?

LEVINE: Do you know where in Poland?

POMPER: Ostrówa - Ostrówa Mazowiecka. that's the name of the town. And come into the room and give me raw milk from the cow's udders and I still feel the taste today and I had it for years. It gave to all of us, not only me. And it wasn't pasteurized and I never got sick, knock on wood.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: So I don't know what to tell you.

LEVINE: How many of there were you - in the family?

POMPER: Four - girls - and my father and my mother. But my mother had a little girl in America. Genie, she was born - the fifth girl. We - we - four came from Europe, that's the way there and the fifth one was born in America.

LEVINE: Ok, now did you have grandparents?

POMPER: Yes, my grandfather. My grandfather was a stinker. He was here in 1900 or before then and he said America was not for Jewish people. So he didn't want Jewish people to come to America. He says we shouldn't come here. The nerve of him to think that. I could have been American born. And I could have had a nice - a better life than what I had. But he wasn't interested.

LEVINE: So he came around 1900 and then he went back?

POMPER: Yes, before-

LEVINE: And you knew him?

POMPER: I remember him a little bit, yes, I remember him.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about him?

POMPER: He was a nice looking man, and he had a little beard. He was tall and he spoke very well, he know what he was saying. And he worked - he did wonders because he never took lessons but he was a locksmith. He'd fix locks of people. That's where he made his money. And he saved up a nice few thousand dollars. And he was gonna come back to Poland and be in Poland and put up houses - brick houses. We had wooden houses and he was going to make them brick -- houses. But he never lived to see it because Hitler came in and that was the end of our lives or whatever.

LEVINE: But you left before Hitler came in?

POMPER: Oh, sure, or else I wouldn't be here.

LEVINE: So this town, this little town that you grew up, do you know what it was near? Was it near Warsaw?

POMPER: Yes, two hours from Warsaw.

LEVINE: Okay.

POMPER: By - by train, two hours.

LEVINE: North, south, do you know? What direction?

POMPER: No, no.

LEVINE: No, ok.

POMPER; I wouldn't know that.

Levine: And did you go to school there?

POMPER: Yes, I did. I went to the first grade and - and they taught - a nice teacher there. I think she was Jewish -- that teacher but she was talking Polish. And she taught me the alphabet and to add - only one two and two. And even she taught me how much is two times two - the ti- the times table. She was a very nice teacher, good-looking lady.

LEVINE: Now, was she teaching in Polish or in Yiddish or?

POMPER: Polish.

LEVINE: In Polish.

POMPER: Yes , were teaching Polish.

LEVINE: The schools were Polish, right?

POMPER: Oh yes. I spoke Polish that time too.

LEVINE: Were you treated nicely or was there anti-Semitism when you were in school?

POMPER: Yea, I know when my father came in, told me this man got - were held up. Whoever had a beard to the - boys used to -- gentiles used to take the beard and throw it on the floor and step on it and whatever. Their own hair, the tragedies - tragic. And then that's what they - that's what happened there.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: No doctor. I never had a doctor there.

LEVINE: Do you remember people getting sick?

POMPER: In Poland?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: Not my family, my family didn't get sick.

LEVINE: Well now that's good.

POMPER: Yes, that's right. Only one woman, a distant relative in Poland took sick but she got better. They gave her cups what do you call it? Bonkes. You know what cups are?

LEVINE: Yea, but why don't you say it for the tape.

POMPER: They - they gave her cups on the back and she got better. She really did. I approve of that. They gave me bonkes, too. I had a cold once. So they gave me the - the (in Jewish they called bonkes) cups on my back and it got inflamed red. It didn't hurt, it felt funny, it didn't hurt at all. And then they put Vaseline on there or something and the-- and the next day I was well, I was fine. I lost my cold. I believe in 'let's take bonkes' now. (Laughs)

LEVINE: (laughs) Ok, well, now where did you fall - in the family? Were you the oldest?

POMPER: No.

LEVINE: Were you the second?

POMPER: Ruthy was the oldest, my sister Ruthy. Two and a half years older than me. And then I come and then my sister Dottie, a year and a half younger than me. And then the -- the little one, Bidi, came a few years later. About three years later, who knows? I don't know. And then she had one in America but that was a -- I don't have her picture.

LEVINE: So what was your- what was your Jewish name?

POMPER: Khava.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

POMPER: C-H-A-V-A-, did you see fiddler on the roof?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: Remember the Khava there?

LEVINE: Yea

POMPER: That's my name.

LEVINE: So how did you get to have an American name?

POMPER: Oh, my father's relative was an American, married to a - an American lady. And she gave us the names. I don't know, she was very nice. She spoke Jewish and English and Polish. She gave me the names. The first one they called Ruth, Rifka. Me - Khava. Khava was my name. They made the English name later on because my name is Chava on the - on the paper. That they p- writ my -- my birth down.

LEVINE: And what was your - what was your maiden name?

POMPER: My maiden name? Shtender. Standur.

LEVINE: How do you spe--?

POMPER: Today is S-T-A-N-D-E-R, that was my name in Europe. Chava Sten-- Shtender. S-H --- it's S-T-E- and eh, I got along that way. And I liked school. I remember being there, isn't that funny?

LEVINE: What do you remember?

POMPER: I remember sitting in a - in a seat and - and the teacher was with a - their blackboard - the same like here. She wrote things on the blackboard and I was able to see and hear everything. That was when I was able to hear and see. Now I can't see, I can't hear. (Laughs). I hate my life now. I don't like it. I'm not happy.

LEVINE: Well look, you still got a good sense of humor and you got a good---

POMPER: That I always had it. They made me class-wit of - of the -- the high school when I graduated - in America. They called me class-wit.

LEVINE: (laughs) That's cute. Ok, well you went to school and you liked school?

POMPER: Very much, I loved school. Better gone to school than sitting in a room by yourself, in a wooden hut.

LEVINE: Tell me about the hut.

POMPER: A wooden hut and they used to wash the floor and put sand on the - on the - on the floor, what do you call it? Straw - straw. No newspapers, in America we had newspapers, over there we had sand on the floor. And-- and they used to go to the bathroom there. The bathroom was on the outside, and no windows, no air conditioning. And you go inside and you do what you're supposed to and you walk out. I don't know what happened to the manure.

LEVINE: Huh.

POMPER: Yea, I remember that, it's very poor living.

LEVINE: And what did your father do?

POMPER: My father was selling pots and pans in America, on the pushcart. My father had a pushcart and he was selling pots and pans. It was wrong, it wasn't a good thing for him to work at. And then he started to sell vegetables - onions and potatoes. Those were heavy things to carry. My father did it. And in America he sold potatoes and onions.

LEVINE: What did he do in Europe?

POMPER: In Europe? He milked the cow.

LEVINE: (laughs) He didn't really go to work at a job.

POMPER: No, he had no job. No.

LEVINE: Did you have other - many animals or did you grow food or?

POMPER: We had a garden, my grandmother's garden. She planted things. I used to get all fresh vegetables from the ground. Apples that can grow from trees - pears, and I used to get radishes from the floor, from the ground. And scallions, I remember eating scallions. I remember a lot of things about the - the -- my grandmother's garden. I loved it, I was there everyday. I'd eat in the garden. I used to pick vegetables and they allowed me to eat it, so I liked it very much.

LEVINE: Now what did you do - what was the most enjoyable thing you can remember when you were in Poland?

POMPER: When I was in Poland? When she gave me some food.

LEVINE: Yea, were you hungry, I mean?

POMPER: No, not too hungry, no. Because they always had milk and bread. They used to bake bread. My mother used to bake bread.

LEVINE: Wait, just a second here - Oh, I could hear her voice.

POMPER: And she dances beautifully.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Ok we're going to continue on here. So you weren't really hungry because your family grew things that you could eat.

POMPER: That's right, I never went hungry, that's right. We- we had beets, we used to make borscht and potatoes and onions - we always had. They used to keep the potatoes and onions in the cellar so it was chilly - it was cold, so it wouldn't fade when it was hot - heat there. So I remember going in the basement - the cellar - to get some potatoes up to the room, to that hut. One room and everybody slept-- slept there. My father, my mother, and - this --my sisters slept there. Never saw such a thing. And none of us got sick.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. What did you sleep on?

POMPER: There was a bed there. And I also had a feather pillow - feather quilt. They plucked the feathers - goose feathers, that makes it soft. And I had a quilt from that and a pillowcase from that. I -- nice thing with the goose feathers. My grandmother and my mother used to make them.

LEVINE: And - and what was your father's name?

POMPER: Samuel, in Jewish Shmila, in English Samuel.

LEVINE: And what was he like? What was his disposition?

POMPER: My father wasn't that educated. His brother was educated. How come his brother was educated and my father wasn't? I never found out why.

LEVINE: What was he like as a personality?

POMPER: At the beginning, he was - he was a little rough with me. But after a while he was very nice to me, when I started to work. Because [not understood] because I gave him my pay. I made ten dollars a week - I used to give it to him. He was thrilled to get it. My father was - he was all right, my father.

LEVINE: How about your mother, what was her name?

POMPER: My mother - my mother, Khia? No, Ida, Ida. And my mother was brilliant, my mother's mind was brilliant. She knew what you were going to say before you said it. Very bright woman and not my father. Oh, this - this you'll enjoy. They brought somebody - a man - a fellow in for my mother to marry. Here - there you bring them in, you know, to introduce them. So they brought in a nice man - tall - nice looking - but he had small pox on the face. So my mother says, "I'm not going to marry him" And she wouldn't marry him. And she ran under the bed and hid herself. That same fellow, that had the small pox, lived in a small town and he had a windmill. And he used to - from wheat, he used to make flour and everyone came to buy from him. He was very prosperous, very wonderful - that's who I had for an uncle. And he could have been my father but he wasn't.

LEVINE: (Laughs)

POMPER: So we were poor and he was very rich - very nice.

LEVINE: He married your mother's sister?

POMPER: Yes, he married my mother's sister. My mother's sister was a pretty lady anyway and he had small pox. She said, "Oh I didn't see them." My mother didn't like the looks of him, because he was with small pox.

LEVINE: (Laughs) Ok, so your mother was - your mother was brilliant, and what did - were there certain things she tried to instill in you, would you say?

POMPER: She did, she says you girls can fight all you want but don't you dare stop talking to one another. And we never stopped talking to one another. And we were always [not understood] we liked each other very much. And I never cared if I had a friend or didn't because I had my own sisters. And we all got along very well, because of my mother. When we had an argument my mother used to say, "You shut up - you keep out of this - keep out of that." And she had a wet rag and she used to

hit me with the wet rag. (laughs) She never hit us really. My mother was brilliant - too bad she didn't know how to read and write. I think I got a piece of her brain.

LEVINE: Yea, good, good.

POMPER: Because I was smart in school. I'm not showing off, I'm just telling you the truth.

LEVINE: Yea, ok so -so when - did you know anything about America before you came here?

POMPER: Not too much. I was too young to know. I know people who used to get dollars from America. When my mother got a letter with dollars in it, everybody was happy in the room.

LEVINE: Now who would be sending her the dollars?

POMPER: My father sent her dollars.

LEVINE: Oh, he went first.

POMPER: Yea, he was there a few years, about four years without us. He saved up money and he sent us tickets, to come to America.

LEVINE: And what was he doing while he was here, in America?

POMPER: A locksmith.

LEVINE: A locksmith.

POMPER: You mean my father.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: My father was never a locksmith. My father sold potatoes and onions, pots and pans. Anything that he could get a hold of to sell.

LEVINE: And where did he settle?

POMPER: Suffolk Street, in Manhattan, on the third floor. With a toilet in the hall and two families used the toilet. She had four kids, we had three kids -- we all used the same bathroom. And there was a tub in the kitchen. And we used to have to take off the top and put hot water for us to get into - bathe us or get wet or whatever. My mother took care of us though. She always used to fine comb us our hair. She said my kids will never get dirty within the [not understood]. My mother is a brilliant woman.

LEVINE: Did your mother, I saw in the photo you all had big bows, did you keep wearing the big bows when you got to America.

POMPER: No. When we came to --. No. An uncle took us off the boat. He - he made us go into - where - to Ellis Island. So he says, so he

says, " You're not gonna look foreign." We used to - we wore hats, like a cap. So he took the cap off and threw it away. My uncle wouldn't let us look like it's foreigners.

LEVINE: Wow, now who was this uncle? Your mother's....

POMPER ...Yea my mother's side - my mother's side, yes, my mother's brother.

LEVINE: And did he live in the lower east side too?

POMPER: Yes. No, he lived in Brooklyn. He had a nice house and he didn't ta-- take the family to his house. He found an apartment on Suffolk Street, on the third floor. A small apartment, two bedrooms was enough room for me and my sisters. We were there for many years. I was happy there but do you know what? When I went downstairs, they made a circle around me and they said, "Grease ball." They called me greenhorn-grease ball, to me!

LEVINE: Greenhorn-grease ball?

POMPER: Grease ball, yea. I was so aggravated why they called me those names (laughs). So my mother sta-- went to the lad-- that did it. And she said, "Tell your son not to do that to my daughter, she didn't like it." And they stopped - and we were friends for years. With that woman that wa-- called me grease ball and all that.

LEVINE: (Laughs)

POMPER: Her name was Clara, I'll never forget her.

LEVINE: She was a little girl then?

POMPER: She was a little girl too, yes. But she was older than me a little. She's the one that called me a grease ball. I was so aggravated why they called me that.

LEVINE: Ok, now let's see. When you - do you remember getting ready to leave - your little town in Poland?

POMPER: Yes. My mo-my grandmother took over. My grandmother moved into that little house and she stayed there with - with the - with the garden, everything. My grandmother pushed us - gave us a lot of - thing --. Oh and another thing. My grandfather (that wouldn't let us come to America because he said America is not for Jewish people.). "You wont be able to say prayers in Jewish - whatever." So they sent him to a - a -- a rabbi and the rabbi said to my mother, "Mrs. Standor, get out of Poland with your four daughter - you don't belong here." And that's why my mother went to America, becau-because the rabbi told her to get out of Poland. A blessing on him, otherwise would have been dead.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: Yea.

LEVINE: So your mother was the one that wanted you - if you didn't go to America, what?.. Your father would have gone back?

POMPER: I guess so, I don't know--I have no idea. Yea. but wh-- my - the rabbi told us to go to America. And that's when we bought tickets and got the boat ready - whenever. And we came here, the four of us, four girls and one mother.

LEVINE: Wow, do you remember leaving home?

POMPER: Poland?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: Not too well. But I do remember my mother packed up a bucket, that she used to soak the meat in, to kosher it. She was afraid she wouldn't find a bucket again (laughs).

LEVINE: So she brought it with her?

POMPER: Yes, she came to America with the bucket -- to kosher the meat. (Both laugh) Now I think about it, I get sick to my stomach how ignorant we were.

LEVINE: Well you were from a little town that nobody knew, right?

POMPER: That's right, nobody knew nothing.

LEVINE: So you left and do you know how you got to the port? Do you know what port you left from?

POMPER: Yes, Warsaw, from Warsaw, we left.

LEVINE: And how did you get to Warsaw, do you know?

POMPER: With a buggy, my grandfather put us into a buggy and wheeled us there, with a buggy - no car.

LEVINE: Horse and buggy, right?

POMPER: Yea, horse and buggy.

LEVINE: Ok so you got to Warsaw and do you remember the ship?

POMPER: Oh, the ship I know. I was the only one from the whole family that was well. Everybody was sick to their stomach throwing up. Edith was healthy - running around the boat, had a lot of fun. And the sailors gave me things to eat - oranges, grapes. I never had that in Poland. I never ate - tasted a grape in Poland, or an orange. And they gave us bananas. All the fruits they were able to get they gave me, and I had it on the boat (laughs).

LEVINE: So they must have liked you, right?

POMPER: Yes, they liked me, yes.

LEVINE: Yea, so you had - what was the name of the ship?

POMPER: Arabic. A-R-A- -- Arab -- B-I-C. Ric-bicI. had a picture of the ship but I don't know where it is now.

LEVINE: Ok.

POMPER: Seven days on the water.

LEVINE: And you were the only healthy one?

POMPER: I was the only one that...

LEVINE: You were the only one that was healthy.

POMPER: That's right. Everybody was sick to their stomach, not Edith. I never threw up, never did that.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

POMPER: Yea, we saw the Statue of Liberty. We were thrilled (laughs), look what's over there. The Statue of Liberty. We -- they - we saw the pictures of that, and we're there. And my uncle came to take us off the ship because he was Americanized. And my father was busy, who knows -- that he didn't come. My uncle took us off the ship and took us to the apartment on Suffolk Street, on the third floor.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island at all?

POMPER: Ellis Island? Yes, eh - they examined me and then one - the doctor or someone asked me how much five times seven? Because I say I know arithmetic, so they threw questions at me. I shouldn't have opened my mouth (laughs).

LEVINE: So did you know the answer?

POMPER: Yes, I did know the answer. It was lucky that I knew it.

LEVINE: So everybody got through without any problems?

POMPER: Yea, no problems - we were healthy. They examined our eyes and our ears -

LEVINE: Uh huh, now --

POMPER: In Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did - were there a lot of people there?

POMPER: Yes, all people - when we came in there were people there. We have a plaque in Ellis Island with my mother's, and fathers name and my name there.

LEVINE: Oh, great.

POMPER: My name is Stander. S-T-A-N-D-E-R, in Ellis Island. My sister saw it, I didn't. I got to go one day, before I go bye-bye.

LEVINE: Good.

POMPER: Before I die.

LEVINE: All right so, your name - your name was Stander but when you were in Poland you said it was S-H-

POMPER: Shtender. With a Z. S-Z

LEVINE: Oh, S-Z --- A-N?

POMPER: A-N-D-E-R. Stander, something like that.

LEVINE: Ok, so when you left Ellis Island -- did you know that uncle?

POMPER: Yes, I knew the uncle, yes. He was a wealthy guy. The uncle lived in America and he had a shop - he made garments for men, you know, clothing. He was very wealthy. He should have taken the four of us to his house or [not understood] and not send us to Sussex Street with the poor people. We should have lived with the uncle. We were angry at the uncle after a while, why he didn't take care of us?

LEVINE: You say - did he buy you clothes? He said he didn't want you to look like foreigners, right?

POMPER: No, we had certain hats on our head that he didn't like, so he threw it away. He threw the hats away, I remember that.

LEVINE: Uh huh, so did he give you clothes?

POMPER: Who?

LEVINE: American clothes, your uncle?

POMPER: He didn't give us, my father bought us. We went to Klein, S. Klein on Fourteenth Street. And my father bought me a coat, a suit, and shoes. Everything at Klein -- S. Klein. He took us there, the four of us, but two of us wore the same size. So the only two that I get different shoes. The only thing I got when I was young was shoes because I had a big foot. I never got clothes, I never had new clothes. I used to wear my sister's clothes. I was a size eight shoe and my sister was a size six, so I couldn't wear their shoes. That's the only thing I got was shoes.

LEVINE: (laughs) Ok, do you remember what Klein's was like?

POMPER: What, what?

LEVINE: Do you remember what Klein's was like on the square, Klein's?

POMPER: There are lots of times, sure. A busy place, very nice. And they had a certain section where they had rejects from people - fancy places, that's where we went to look for clothes. We were poor. Yea, I was at Klein's very often.

LEVINE: (laughs) Ok, so then you went to school soon after you got here?

POMPER: Immediately, when I got here right away we were registered in the school and I loved - I liked school very much, I loved it. I never resented getting up in the morning to go to school. None of us did, the four of us liked it. And this - the little one, she was real pretty, she was a beautiful lady. She used to come to visit me here. When I was a little older and she was younger.

LEVINE: So when you got to school, did you pick up quickly - the new language?

POMPER: Yes, I was able - the alphabet I knew. So that word because B-E-C-A-U-S-E, it - when I came here I called it 'bessa-oosa'. That's the way I read it. Isn't it funny, I should remember to this date. Because 'bessa-oosa' that's the way I -- it was written. But it not an American way (laughs).

LEVINE: So how did you learn? How did you pick it up so quickly - the language?

POMPER: I loved books, I always read books. I loved them, every one of them. I used to read a lot of wrote books. I picked up the language very easily. No one knew that I came from Europe. I didn't have no accent - never at any time. As a matter of fact, none of the four of us ever had an accent. And my mother for sixty years said, "Me no speak-a-the-English." My mother said it (laughing).

LEVINE: So did you have to help your mother sometimes with English, I mean if she had to go and do something ---

POMPER: Oh, you mean vegetables when I was a little girl?

LEVINE: Anything, yea.

POMPER: I used to go in the garden to eat it - to pick it - no, I didn't help. She had -- I guess people did it, I never did that.

LEVINE: No, I mean when she came to America, did you have to help your mother when she had to do something that needed English?

POMPER: Sure, we did - my mother - and we also wrote letters for her, took care of the bills, everything. And my other - my oldest sister was

very bright and she did a lot of things for my mother too. And I also was all right with my mother.

LEVINE: So did your mother keep her Old World ways - did she keep some of the ways --?

POMPER: No, my mother was a brilliant woman. She changed, she became Americanized immediately. In all her ways. She never stopped us from going shopping on a Saturday. Saturday you're not supposed to go shopping when you're religious, but my mother never stopped us. As a matter of fact, she gave us money and said, "Go- go have fun." So how could you dislike a woman like that?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: A brilliant, beautiful lady --too bad she wasn't educated.

LEVINE: So were you religious, were you a religious family?

POMPER: Not very religious. In the beginning a little bit religion - no. Right away we stopped right away and became Americanized. We did everything you people did.

LEVINE: That's what you wanted, right? To be American.

POMPER: That's right, that's right and I did. Was happy.

LEVINE: Let's see, so you went through grade school and then what?

POMPER: I we-I we-- in Europe I was in the kindergarten and then in grade school and then I left the country- and I came to America.

LEVINE: And did you finish? How far did you go?

POMPER: Well lets see about -. I was - I started maybe about five and a half,-six. So I went there until I was seven.

LEVINE: And then in America how long did you stay in school?

POMPER: I - as I said - all the time. As a matter of fact, I graduated high school and I was going to go to college. So I registered for the night course in college. But how could you work during the day and go to college at night, so I dropped it. But my kids are educated.

LEVINE: Good.

POMPER: Every one of them. As soon as they were born they knew they had to go to school. As a matter of fact, my daughter, Barbie, the older one was going to quit. And she had a good job in --in -- the place and she modeled hats and she was a very pretty girl ----

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

POMPER: I said, "Over my dead body. You are going to college for me - for one year and after that you do whatever you want." To this day they thank me. They say that you did the right thing, I certainly did. I always stressed education. I guess because my mother wasn't educated, neither was my father and I resented it, so that's why I pushed my kids to be educated. I went to high school, I didn't go to college. I should have.

LEVINE: When you finished high school, did you get a job?

POMPER: When I finished high school? No, I got married early - I got married I was nineteen.

LEVINE: Oh, how did you meet your husband?

POMPER: Through the business. I worked in a hardware store. The -- I came to wo -- to - to write books. They took me off the bookkeeping and they put me on the floor. They say, "You'll be a better benefit to us on the floor to sell." Because I always had a mouthpiece, I was able to talk. I was - I was never an introvert, I was always outgoing. I guess because I had sisters - I was never an introvert. I was never afraid to talk to people. Even the president - I'd get up and ta-- talk to him (laugh).

LEVINE: That's great. So you were in a hardware store?

POMPER: Yes, my husband had a hardware store. So I stayed in the hardware store part-time. He opened up a store - the store is still there, I think. It's on-on Avenue C and Sixth Street on the corner. My husband - I think it is still there - they told me it's there. I wish I can go there and look for it.

LEVINE: When I'm in that area, I'll go look for you.

POMPER: No. Avenue C and Seventh street, not Sixth street. Seventh Street.

LEVINE: Oh, ok.

POMPER: Yea, the hardware store. I think the hardwa-it's still there, the hardware store - my fa - my father sold it.

LEVINE: Well now who had the hardware store, your father or your husband?

POMPER: Oh, my husband - I'm sorry.

LEVINE: Ok.

POMPER: I'm getting screwed up a little.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

POMPER: My husband's name? Don't know if his name - Leibel -- Louie - Louie Pomper. L-O-U-I-S - Louis.

LEVINE: And how do you spell your last name?

POMPER: Now?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: P-O-M-P-E-R.

LEVINE: Ok.

POMPER: It was that way in the beginning, too - it was never changed.

LEVINE: OK now, so that's the name of the hardware store? Louie?

POMPER: Louie's hardware store, yes.

LEVINE: Mm hmm, ok, I'll look for it - I'll let you know.

POMPER: Square hardware -

LEVINE: Square -

POMPER: Square Hardware. I think it's still there.

LEVINE: When I send you the tape, I'll let you know if I see it.

POMPER: Yea, do that please. Square Hardware.

LEVINE: All right so how did you meet Louie?

POMPER: Through the store. He worked one store - the other side of the street and I worked on this side of the street. And - and -- and my - and the la-- my boss that I worked for was a lady boss. She heard that my husband wasn't happy with the - with the job - with the salary. So she sent me across to tell him to come in at night after work. She wants to talk to him. She offered him a job in the - in that store. He didn't -- he wouldn't go. "He said, "I got to go home and ask my wife." He was ashamed to say he was going home to ask his mother. (Both laugh) So he said, " I'm going home to ask my wife." So I thought he was married. And then when he met me outside (I was going to eat) he wanted to pay my check. How much was it? Fifty cents. I wouldn't let him. I said, "Married men shouldn't pay girls' checks." He says, " I'm not married," he says, "I just -- just told them that because I didn't want them to say that I'm gonna ask my wife."

LEVINE: (laughing) It was cute.

POMPER: Yes. It was funny.

LEVINE: So then you started seeing each other and?

POMPER: Yea, we started seeing each other -I liked his personality.

LEVINE: What was it like - what kind of personality?

POMPER: He sang beautifully, he knew all the Jewish songs and he was like an actor. He did everything - very - full of personality. That, yes -- wouldn't take it away from him.

LEVINE: Well now were you working at Square Hardware and he was across the street?

POMPER: No, the same - I worked at his store - my husband's store.

LEVINE: When you first met him, you were working in some other store?

POMPER: Yes, I was working for another lady, Billie Weiden I was working for. Another lady, an electrician that did electrical work.

LEVINE: Oh.

POMPER: That's who I worked for. And then I came to be on the books there but they took me off the books and they said you'd do better selling than on the books. So I never did any - too much bookkeeping because I didn't know bookkeeping. I took it up in school.

LEVINE: So you would have gone to college but you couldn't work and -

POMPER: I couldn't afford it.

LEVINE: Right, right. So then did you have children right away?

POMPER: Yes, I did -- became pregnant right away, that stupid me.

LEVINE: (Laughing)

POMPER: Ah, let me see. I had a baby about - by fourteenth months after I was married, I had a baby. And she was a chubby little girl and it - and it was -- it wasn't too nice for me at the time because I didn't have too much money and lived on the fourth floor with a walk-up -- with a fat baby. And that -- then I - I came into the store and the money got a little better because they weren't stealing anything. I was watching. When I came into the store they said, "Ah-ah, she's here already ." On me. So we did - we we're all together - my husband and I. My husband was very handy. He fixed anything - you give him something, he fixed it --- very brainy.

LEVINE: So then your husband got the store for himself? He took over the store?

POMPER: No, a different place and everything. Not the same -- on a different street. My husband worked on First Avenue and the store was on Avenue C. First Avenue was a better neighborhood than Avenue C. Avenue C was foreigners and poor people. First Avenue was nice. They even had

Venetian blinds already. You don't remember then, do you? Only rich people had Venetian blinds, did you know that?

LEVINE: No.

POMPER: You ever hear of it?

LEVINE: No.

POMPER: (laughing) Only rich people had Venetian blinds.

LEVINE: So they had Venetian blinds on First Avenue?

POMPER: Yes, yes but not where I was (laughs).

LEVINE: Huh, so then your husband took on his own store on Avenue C.

POMPER: Yes, he took his own st-- made his own store and I went to work for him and I did very well with him. We did very --.He was very good mechanic and I was a good saleslady, so we teamed together.

LEVINE: Did you enjoy that?

POMPER: I loved selling. I loved it, yes. I didn't want to stay home and wash diapers. I loved the outside, always did.

LEVINE: So did somebody else take care of your baby then?

POMPER: My mother came to help, yes. My mother didn't live far away from me. My mother was very nice to me. And then we - we hired a girl that came from school and she helped watch the baby with me. Never left the baby alone.

LEVINE: What was the baby's name?

POMPER: Roberta "Bobbie" -

LEVINE: That was your first-born?

POMPER: Yea, you know she is sixty-five now?

LEVINE: Wow.

POMPER: She could quit working but she don't want to quit yet. She's sixty-five, I have a daughter sixty-five, I - ah-

LEVINE: You turn around and the years just slip by.

POMPER: Oh my. Six-- I have a daughter who is sixty-five? You're crazy, I -- I'm too young to have that. But I had a baby so early that I got -- we grew up together. And then I had a son, my Stewart. Very handy like his father.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

POMPER: The same thing and he - he's -- he was supposed to be a doctor. He wanted to be a doctor and my husband was pushing him. So was I. A girl came into the store and got ahold of him and he got married and that was the end of the doctor. But he is a pharmacist. He went - he became a pharmacist. I got nice children, nothing to kick about.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

POMPER: Then I have another daughter that -- twenty years later. There is twenty years difference between the two girls. Now you know my whole life story.

LEVINE: Wow (laughs) and what's your baby girl's name? What's the youngest girl's name?

POMPER: Mindy. She lives in California. She met a fellow that live in California. He used to work for the - he used to work for the theatres. He - he'd show the people where to sit and he had a camera on his shoulder. What the hell do you call them? A photographer, who knows.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: Yea he did that.

LEVINE: Ok well now lets go back to like ah - ok so then - you stayed on the Lower East Side the whole time?

POMPER: I what?

LEVINE: Stayed to live on the Lower East Side?

POMPER: Yes -

LEVINE: Because the store was there and you stayed to live there.

POMPER: Yes, that's right. I lived there - yes - and my kids were born on the East Side, too.

LEVINE: What else can you remember about the lower east side from the time you first got there?

POMPER: There were pushcarts there. There were a lot of pushcarts. And there was all kinds of people there. Was -- there was Polish, Italian, Jewish, colored people - not too many colored, a handful. We didn't have no colored. I never saw a colored person until I came here. We had no colored people in Eur --- Europe. In Europe we had people with beards, always with beards (laughing).

LEVINE: Yea, and did you - was the lower east side an area that you really liked?

POMPER: I did, I liked it - it was very beaut - it was nice. You can't be bored with it. So many nice things to see to do. I was always - I was happy there, I wasn't sad.

LEVINE: How about your sisters, did they stay around the Lower East Side too?

POMPER: No, no, no. One sister married - he did hats. What a - it was - ma-- manufactured hats. He didn't manufacture, he worked there. He was a poor slob, my brother-in-law. And the other sister, the [not understood] ,his father was in the business - they made leather jackets, leather goods. He was doing very well - that -- the one, Dottie - the one after me. She had a good life. She had her own apartment. I lived with my mother and father. She had her own apartment - Dottie, yea. So -

LEVINE: She stayed in the Lower East Side?

POMPER: No, she lived in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh.

POMPER: Williamsburg, across the bridge.

LEVINE: Was that like considered a step up? If you moved from the lower east side ---

POMPER: Yes. It is. I never wanted to step up ---

LEVINE: (Laughing)

POMPER: ..but I didn't care because I got - I made money there, I made a good living. So who the hell needs to step up. I didn't care about that - not after I was married. We did all right, my husband and I did very nice together. That store is still there - it's ninety-six Avenue C - the address. Write down Square Hardware, ninety-six Avenue C, New York City.

LEVINE: Okay.

POMPER: Between Sixth and Seventh Street - between the two streets.

LEVINE: So when you look back on it, do you think the fact that you came to this country as a young person - do you think it made a difference in your personality?

POMPER: On me? Because I came here? Sure.

LEVINE: What difference do you think it made? How do you think it affected you - that you came to a new place and started over?

POMPER: I wasn't so poor anymore. I had dollars in my pocket. I was able to buy things and do things. I didn't have a lot of money, but whatever I had was enough. I never looked to go higher, bigger. And I

never envied anyone. Never did, because I had sisters to play with, my own sisters, and then when I got married I had my kids to work with. I never envied anybody - no. I did all right for myself, I'm not sorry.

LEVINE: And you say you - you- could you speak Yiddish?

POMPER: Very well. I speak very good Jewish. Linda brought in a man that to tell -- to tell the Jewish stories so I had to help him, (laughs) to tell what to say - the word. Because I spoke Jewish to my mother. I always spoke Jewish to my mother and father.

LEVINE: Well you probably know, I know there's some very funny expressions ---

POMPER: Yes.

LEVINE: ...in Yiddish. Sometimes its like you're like a knot that's tied twice. You know those sort of funny ---

POMPER: Expressions.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: But just because I want them wouldn't come to me. My mind is not like that anymore. It used to be a wonderful mind - no more.

LEVINE: Well, what are you looking forward to now?

POMPER: Now I shouldn't - I don't live -- I don't want to live too long either because I can't walk and I can't see. I'm not happy. So I don't care if it happens - if I die in another year or two years or whatever. I'm not afraid of death. I'm angry at the world and me because I'm blind. Because I got macular degeneration. I'm very angry - who am I angry at? Fate, God?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: God didn't do it to me, the devil did it, not God. You're not don-- do bad things.

LEVINE: Can you listen? Can - can you listen to those books, you know you can get them on tape.

POMPER: I know I can get them but I don't want them because I just listen to the radio. I got the radio on my bed and I listen to that all the time. I know all the news. I love it, I love the news.

LEVINE: Did you ever have a hero? Like in your life, somebody you really looked up to - either a real person that you knew or a public personality that you admired?

POMPER: The president.

LEVINE: Which one?

POMPER: This late one is no good either, (laughs) I listen to his show. You know his name is Mike Savage, he is on the radio.

LEVINE: Yea, I've heard it.

POMPER: You've heard of him?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: That's my god - I listen to him. He tells me who to like and who to dislike.(Both laughing) and I follow him.

LEVINE: But you stayed being a reader all your life - you liked to read.

POMPER: Yes I did. Always like to read, yes.

LEVINE: Were there any events in your life like maybe the depression, or World War II, any things that happened in the world - in the country that you remember particularly.

POMPER: Somebody at the door?

LEVINE: Yes. Just a second --

POMPER: I admired Roosevelt when he got in.

LEVINE: Did you?

POMPER: And he made changes, he helped us along. He made the social security, whatever. I admired Roosevelt - was it Roosevelt?

LEVINE: Yea, Roosevelt.

POMPER: Yeah, Roosevelt. I don't want to mix the names.

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: And now I admire the guy - Mike Javits.

LEVINE: Savage.

POMPER: Oh, I love him.

LEVINE: Yea, what do you like about him so much?

POMPER: The way he talks, the way he presents this things. Word -- golden words come out of his mouth. And I'm jealous of him.

LEVINE: (laughing) Ok well lets see. Is there anything else you can think of about coming to this country - about living in the Lower East Side - anything? How long did you live there?

POMPER: Lower east side? A long, long time. As a matter of fact, when I got married I lived on the Lower East Side because the store was there -

LEVINE: Right.

POMPER: And then - and we - I moved - we moved lets see where, Lindenhurst - across in Brooklyn - in Long Island rather. And I couldn't stay there because I didn't have no - no birds, no-no garbage trucks. I'm used to a lot of noise and it was too quiet for me. I didn't -- I didn't like it at all (laughing).

LEVINE: Oh, really.

POMPER: You wouldn't believe it, would you? That's what happened to me.

LEVINE: Oh, that's funny. So after you moved from there, where did you go?

POMPER: After we moved?

LEVINE: Yea.

POMPER: I lived on the lo-on the East Side all my life.

LEVINE: And then you went to Long Island and then---

POMPER: Just for a short time.

LEVINE: ..And then you came here?

POMPER: Yea, yea, I came here.

LEVINE: Ok, I see. Ok, all right well is there anything else you can think of that you might want to mention?

POMPER: I don't know. I'll take your telephone number in case something pops in.

LEVINE: Ok, well I want to thank you. It's been a very nice interview and I-

POMPER: Tok, tok, tok.

LEVINE: (laughing) So I'm speaking with Edith Pomper, who came here when she was seven. Your eighty-four, right -at the time of this interview?

POMPER: Yes, yes. Oh at that time, yes. I'm more now. I'm ninety-one.

LEVINE: Oh, you're ninety-one, what am I saying.

POMPER: I'm ninety-one.

LEVINE: Ninety-one, yes. Ninety-one at the time of this interview, I'm sorry. And you think you came here around 1915, we're gonna guess at that.

POMPER: Yea.

LEVINE: Ok so this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I want to thank you very much.

POMPER: Thank you. You're a lovely lady.

LEVINE: Thanks, and you are too. Ok....

END OF INTERVIEW

EI-1412/POMPER