

EI-153

JOSEPH ZUCKERBERG

BIRTH DATE: JUNE 3, 1923

INTERVIEW DATE: 5/9/1992

RUNNING TIME: 33:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: LAKE WORTH, FLORIDA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1994

TRANSC

US: NEWARK, NJ RIPT REVIEWED

BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 3/1994

POLAND, 1929

SHIP: BEN GAZZI

AGE 5

RESIDENCES: POLAND: LEMBERG became LUOV,

RUSSIA

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today in Lake Worth, Florida, with Joseph Zuckerberg, who came from Poland in 1929, just three days before he turned six years old. Today is May 9, 1992. Well, I'm very happy to be here.

ZUCKERBERG: I'm very happy you are here.

LEVINE: Let's start by my asking you your birth date.

ZUCKERBERG: June 3, 1923.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

ZUCKERBERG: At that time it was called Lemberg, Poland, and now I understand it's called L'vov, which is part of Russia.

LEVINE: And do you remember what was Lemberg from before you . . .

ZUCKERBERG: Not really. Just my parents, my mother was on the Yiddish theater then, and my father, too. And he came, oh, about five years before, probably around 1924, to this country. And I remember my mother on the stage and things like that, even though I was little.

LEVINE: You remember her on the stage in Poland?

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

ZUCKERBERG: She was a star then. And she told me I was really rough. I had a governess and I always ran away from her, like all little boys. That's what she told me. That part I don't remember. And like all three, four-year-old boys, you know, they can't sit still. They have to run around. But I remember coming over on a ship. The ship at that time was called the Ben Gazzi, or something like that. And I know a lot of we came, of course, the poorest class, and everybody, a lot of people were seasick. And I remember singing to them, because I was only, you know, five and seven eighths, almost six years old. And I guess little boys don't get seasick. And I remember definitely coming to Ellis Island because I had to get undressed. And you know how little boys are. When they're undressed they put their hands over their important part, they're ashamed. And they gave us a bath. And I was introduced to ice cream for the first time in my life. So every, when I

saw my mother I said, "Mamushka, luda, Mamaushka, luda." Which means, "Ma, please get me more ice cream." And that's one of the few words I still remember. And it was a very exciting experience at Ellis Island. And everything was okay. So my father, of course, was waiting for us. And we came to America. And it was very exciting, the whole trip. And we were healthy, so I guess they just let us right through.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the Yiddish theater? First in Poland, and then in this country.

ZUCKERBERG: Okay. My aunt was really a big star. She was the Hedy Lamar of her days.

LEVINE: What was her name?

ZUCKERBERG: Regina Zuckerberg. And later she married, oh, in her late years, Boris Tomashevsky, who was the Clark Gable of his time. They were making quite a lot of money a week, like five hundred dollars a week, I understand, when people were making ten dollars a week. And they lost all their money in Depression time from the banks. My mother, I remember her on Yiddish theater in Poland. She was a prima donna. And my father was on a stage in New York. And, of course, in between, in between the days you couldn't get on a stage, I mean, when they weren't working, he had to paint houses to make a living.

And then, of course my father brought us over in 1929. And everything else. And my uncle helped, of course, my father to bring us over, my mother and I. And we started the new world. And my father had a little hardware store in Newark, New Jersey. And, of course, when I was six years old we had to help out, because we just had to struggle during the Depression days. And while kids were playing outside I, not that I had to, but I wanted to help my father even though I was six or seven years old. And life was hard. In fact, I didn't have a room for myself when we did live in an apartment. We lived on 296, isn't that funny? I still remember it. 296 Peshon Avenue in Newark, New Jersey. And I had a little room with merchandise in it because we had a store and my father had to make a living. And thank God we all worked together and I graduated high school here in Newark. Went to, of course, grammar school, high school. And I joined the navy and then I opened up a photography studio. I was a navy photographer. And from there luck was with me.

LEVINE: Well, was the Yiddish theater operative during the Depression years?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, sure. People, one thing in the '20s, or '29, '30, '31 here, even though there was a Depression, people always found to be entertained in the Yiddish theater. After all, there was no television. In those days a seat was fifty cents or something like that. They all found that fifty cents or a dollar to go to the Yiddish theater.

LEVINE: But your father wasn't making enough of a living there? Is that why . . .

ZUCKERBERG: Well, it's like any actor. You have parts that last four or five months, and then you're out of work. And when you're out of work you have to do something else. So he did anything he could get a hold of. My father was in a Yiddish theater in the New York area. And my uncle, who brought us over, he continued for another, in fact, on Second Avenue. And after he got a little older he worked in Coney Island on 25th Street Theater, which is a Yiddish theater. And he struggled. There, he did whatever he can to make a living, my uncle as well as my father.

LEVINE: Were they acting or were they singing?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, yeah. They were singers, yes. Yeah. All of, everybody in Yiddish theater sang, had to sing, before you get on a show. I remember it well. And as a kid, as I say, they used to have chopped herring in the snack bars, you know. That I remember, because I liked chopped herring, and today I still like it. It's not good for me, but I still like it. And it was a struggle until, as I say, in the late thirties, and Second Avenue really was blooming, even though it was Depression time. And I think right after the war only a few theaters were left, the National and a few others.

LEVINE: Let's see. Do you remember anything else about the house you lived in or the town in Poland?

ZUCKERBERG: I, oh, I remember that well. We had one room and a few of the, my aunts and uncles, we all shared, like, we lived in one, in one room. And I remember one of my uncles making a bathtub. He was in the metal business. And that was a big thrill because we did not have a bathtub. And I remember that vividly. He brought us, out of stainless steel, because he was a metalsmith. And it was crowded but that's the way people lived in those days in the Twenties. And how we survived, I can't understand in today's condition how we survived it. And I imagine there must have been a bathroom outside when we, a lava, you know. (he laughs) Not the conveniences we have today. When I look back, how did we survive? It's unbelievable.

LEVINE: And was it a small town that you lived in?

ZUCKERBERG: No. Lemberg, I understand, was a very big town. In fact, Paul Muni came from Lemberg who was, as you know, a great actor. He was on the Yiddish theater with my father. And, in fact, he was born in Lemberg, and from there, and Paul Muni's father was also an actor. And Paul Muni was the exact same age as my father was. They were both born in 1894 according to the source I have here. And it was a struggle just living. How we lived, I know we had one, probably a kitchen and one bedroom and there were several families in one.

That's how we survived. That part I remember well.

LEVINE: Were your grandparents, how was it that your mother and father came to be in the theater? Do you know?

ZUCKERBERG: I guess it was a way of making a living getting away from the squalid conditions, and that was the only way to get up in the world. My grandparents, I don't believe, were in, no. They were, my grandfather, I understand, was a fire, in the fire department. And I don't, I know I had two sets of grandparents, but I was very small then, and, as you can see.

LEVINE: You had a large extended family.

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, yeah. A large family, right. Quite large. And unfortunately they're all gone, yeah, in the Holocaust.

LEVINE: Now, your father came over first.

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah. My . . .

LEVINE: Was there anything that precipitated his coming?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, my uncle, my uncle was the oldest. His name was Sigmund Zuckerman, and my father was the baby. So he brought him over I believe around 1924 to get established here and to bring us over. And I'm thrilled that he brought us over in '29, because right after that

things got worse in Poland, as you know, and Germany. And everything else, a lot of pogroms and all that. But . . .

LEVINE: Did you experience any of that before you left Poland?

ZUCKERBERG: No, not that I remember. I probably didn't. But, you know, it was hard to make a living. I mean, living in one room with several families. You read about it in today's TV. I mean, you read about it in today's newspapers and you watch on TV where three or four families huddle in one room, in one kitchen. But that's what we were used to and we existed.

LEVINE: Who were you closest to as a child in Poland?

ZUCKERBERG: You mean when my father wasn't there? My mother's brother. I remember him taking me to the circus. Isn't that something? I remember that. And he took me everywhere. And then, of course, when I came to this country, to the United States, of course, my other uncle always took me here and there. I was six, seven. But my mother's brother really was like my father to me. He took me here and played with me. I remember him taking me definitely to a circus.

LEVINE: What was his name?

ZUCKERBERG: I don't remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother's maiden name?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, sure. Goldberg.

LEVINE: Goldberg. And her first name?

ZUCKERBERG: Ann. Hanya in Jewish, or Ann. And I named my studio Karl-Ann. My father's name was Karl and my mother's name was Ann. So I combined the name Karl-Ann studio, which is still in business now in Union, New Jersey. And that also brought me a lot of luck. So I was successful as a photographer, and I had a lot of friends that supported me. That was very nice.

LEVINE: Let's see. Do you remember when you, actually when you saw your father when you got to New York you probably didn't even know him.

ZUCKERBERG: No, of course not. I didn't remember him, of course, because I didn't see him for five years or four years or whatever. And, of course, now I have beautiful memories of my father. He worked so hard for us to bring us over to this country, to the United States. And God bless him.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was like, like meeting your father and getting to know your father when you first came?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, we hugged and kissed, I imagine. And he took me in and whatever fathers do with their little boys, you know. Play baseball or

whatever. Well, I never heard of baseball when I was that young because they don't do that in Poland. And I guess, well, at least we had a little apartment. And, as I say, at 296 Peshon Avenue we had a room and, you know, a two-bedroom or whatever it was. And it was very exciting.

LEVINE: It was exciting to you, the apartment.

ZUCKERBERG: The apartment. Sure, something. Why, it was something with a bathroom, wow, and a bathtub. And it was, (he laughs) heaven. Listen, after living in such squalid conditions.

LEVINE: So you, let's see. Do you remember anything, like did you then go to school anywhere?

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah. I went to school. I got here in May, and it's amazing I started school in September. It's called Bergen Street grammar school, and I picked up English right away. It's, and, of course, as you see, I have no accent. And I went eight years to Bergen Street High School, four years to South Side High School. In fact, one of my classmates was Ed Koch, the former mayor of New York. He lived in Newark. That's how we got started in photography. He, Ed, two other fellows and myself, we had a little darkroom at South Side High School and, of course, I pursued it while they went into different fields.

LEVINE: And how did you feel about joining the navy?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, that was a great thrill. I enlisted because I wanted to get into photography, and I told them my experience. I was a school photographer and did a little photography here and there. And, as you know, when you enlist they ask you what kind of work did you do, and I says, "Photography." And right after boot camp they sent me to a photo school in Pensacola, Florida. And then from there advanced photography to Washington, DC. And it was exciting.

LEVINE: When did you enlist?

ZUCKERBERG: I think it's '43 or the end of, actually I have to look it up. I don't know.

LEVINE: So did you see any action?

ZUCKERBERG: No. I was on a carrier. I did recognizance work. And from there I did other photography. I wasn't in really the real action. But we, but I did, I was a specialist and they sent me to different places in my field.

LEVINE: Now, were you on the carrier?

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: During the time of Pearl Harbor?

ZUCKERBERG: No, no, no. This is, Pearl Harbor was '41.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So let's see. So you went into photography right out of

high school and really remained.

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah, right. Well, I worked in a camera store, and I worked at Ohrbachs when I was eighteen or nineteen. And I went to junior college for six months or something. And you do everything, what you can to make a living, you know.

LEVINE: So let's see. Then when did you meet your wife?

ZUCKERBERG: In '50, let's see, 1951, yeah.

LEVINE: And your wife's name?

ZUCKERBERG: Is Edith.

LEVINE: And do you have children?

ZUCKERBERG: We have four children, two grandchildren. We had, we have a girl, boy, girl, boy, and our daughter is now, our youngest daughter is engaged now. She'll be married in November. I have a son who works in New York City, and another son who lives right around the corner here. And our daughter is, her oldest daughter lives in the Washington area. My son-in-law was deputy inspector general of veteran's affairs. He just got promoted to that position. We're very proud of him. And we have two grandchildren. One is fifteen. The other is twelve, will be fifteen and twelve in a few months. So that's

exciting. It's like a new world.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. Is there anything that you can remember that your mother and father, ways that they retained from the old country?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, sure. Strictly kosher, strictly kosher foods. And, well, you're, that was the important thing. My mother would never eat anything that wasn't kosher. And whatever.

LEVINE: Were they a religious family in Poland as well as here?

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah. I remember when I was three years old they told me, and I do remember that I went to Yeshiva school when I was three years old. Of course, that was, every child at that age, mostly in Poland, they went to a Yeshiva. And I went until I came to the United States.

LEVINE: Now, was the town that you were from, was it equally mixed of Jewish and non-Jewish people?

ZUCKERBERG: I would imagine so, but mostly Jewish people there. Mostly it's, I guess. In fact, all our cousins lived there. All my cousins lived there. So I assume, it must have been mostly Jewish, but that I don't remember.

LEVINE: You don't remember if there were public schools that you might have gone to?

ZUCKERBERG: Oh, I'm sure there must have been public schools. Because after all my cousins were much older than I, and they all went to school, I know that. Because, as I say, my uncle who was a metalsmith must have gone to a school to learn the metal trade. And the thrill of that bathtub, wow. That was exciting.

LEVINE: Was there indoor plumbing?

ZUCKERBERG: I would imagine there, oh, yeah. There must have been indoor plumbing. But maybe they didn't have bathtubs. That I can't remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother took, or that you took with you from Poland when you made the trip?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, I remember going on the trip. We went to England first. I remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving the town?

ZUCKERBERG: Yep, I sure do. We went, we went by train and we had salami sandwiches on the train. I remember that clearly. And we went to England, oh, not London, but another commercial city. Liver, could it have been, well . . .

LEVINE: Southampton?

ZUCKERBERG: Southampton, that's it. Right, south. I remember that, going to Southampton. Then from Southampton we took the boat to New York City.

LEVINE: Now, was that a long trip that you made?

ZUCKERBERG: I imagine it was. It must have been four, five, maybe six days. I know we lived in, was it steerage, or whatever you call it?

ZUCKERBERG: Steerage, yeah. On the ship, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember what that was like, being in the steerage?

ZUCKERBERG: No. The people were seasick and it must have been on a lower class. And I remember, as I said before, I sang. You know, because little boys don't get seasick. Now I get seasick. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Were you encouraged in being a performer?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, that's what I really wanted to be, in the theater, because my whole family was in the theater. But my mother said to me, "Yussula (Yiddish)." "Be a schoolteacher." That means, "Joe, be a schoolteacher, not in the theater, because it's hard work." Which it is, you know, performing. But I loved it. So I do, in fact, I run the shows down here. And I'm involved in a lot, when I was younger we were in a lot of shows. And, but I made a bigger living, a steady living in

photography. I would have rather been a comic, but that's the way life is, so what can I tell you. Sure, I'll rather be on the stage. So I entertain my wife quite a lot. (he laughs) I sing to her.

LEVINE: Do you have, did your mother ever, was she involved in the theater once she got here?

ZUCKERBERG: No. Once she got here, and once both of them got here we all worked in my father's little hardware store on Clinton Avenue. Then from there he built the bigger store. And I remember very distinctly when I was maybe seven years old we used to sell mousetraps two for a nickel. And, of course, it was Depression time. And then after some of these customers caught the mouse they would bring it back to my father and say they want their nickel back. My father was also a comic. He said, "At least wash off the blood." You know what I mean? He gave them back the nickel. Listen, a nickel in those days was a lot of money. But I remember the things like, I remember working in a hardware store quite a lot, and selling nuts and bolts. And you have to wait on the customers, all for a big penny. And sometimes it took ten minutes to make a penny, but that's the way life was. We accepted it. And I thank God I came to the United States and made something of myself. You work hard you get somewheres. And I didn't have a car until I was twenty-three years old, while today a kid has to have a car when they're fifteen, sixteen. And when I

opened my studio I was twenty-three, and I had to walk to weddings and things like that because I couldn't afford a car. But God was good to me and that was it.

LEVINE: Do you think that your, the fact that you came here as an immigrant at a young age, do you think that's affected you in some way in your life, in the way you think about things, or attitudes?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, I'm glad there is a country like the United States. I mean, you have all the opportunity. You have to work for it. You just can't sit and wait for something to come. You have to just go and help out and get somewheres. And like I tried working in a theatrical field, so I worked up in the New York Catskill Mountains as a fifth banana, you know, I helped out the comics there. One of my bosses in 19, uh, let's see, 1940, what is it, 1940, oh, around '41, right, or '42 with Milton Berle who worked, at that time, called the Flagler Hotel. And it was Joey Adams. You know, I helped them out with the different skits. And I loved it. I was making five dollars a week and ate with the guests. But it was hard getting started then. So I pursued for a time and joined the navy and went into photography and as I say, I said before thank God I had a lot of friends. They all gave me a break. And they came to me and . . .

LEVINE: You mean, in photography?

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah, right. Yeah, pictures of them, their engagement, and from there the wedding. And everything, everything helped me. So the United States is a great opportunity country. I mean, if you must work, you must, you have to pursue it. Whatever you do you have to pursue it. Maybe if I pursued more theatrical business I could have been on TV today or something. But I'm happy. Thank God I've got lovely children and a nice little house here, and it's the greatest country in the world.

LEVINE: What would you say you're proudest of if you were to look back on your life?

ZUCKERBERG: Well, my family, of course. And how luck was with me in the photography business. Because you have to be lucky, and people helped me out. You know, I started out with only a, I opened up a studio with about twelve hundred dollars. I didn't even have too many pictures. (he laughs) And every time somebody came in I took a picture, you know. I had pictures of them, and I put them on display until I built it up. As I say, thank God for my friends that helped me out, and I was popular in high school, so, because I used to joke around, and I still joke around. I love comedy. And so I'm proud of everything. I'm proud the United States give me this opportunity to do what I want to do.

LEVINE: You know, I was wondering, would you, would you want to sing?

ZUCKERBERG: Would I like to sing?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZUCKERBERG: Yeah, if I trained my . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember anything, like from the old country, that your mother knew or your father knew or you knew?

ZUCKERBERG: Not Yiddish songs any more because, well, (he pauses) I like singing opera. I have sort of a certain, not now, because I have a cold. (he laughs) Just the other day I developed a little cold. As you can hear, my voice is different. No, I used to sing with them, but.

LEVINE: Would you want to?

ZUCKERBERG: To sing now? (he sings a few bars) (they laugh) You mean an opera or something? Oh, let's see.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're continuing now. Joseph Zuckerberg is going to sing "What A Difference A Day Makes."

ZUCKERBERG: (he sings: What a difference a day makes. 24 little hours, brought the sun and the flowers where there used to be rain. It's heaven when

you find romance on your menu, what a difference a day makes, and the difference is you.) Of course I have a little cold, so it doesn't sound as good. And I have another thing. (he sings another song with a Yiddish accent: Once I had a clothing store. Business was so bad. I asked my wife what to do and this is what she said, "Take a can of gasoline. Put it by the door. Take a match, give a scratch, and goodbye clothing store." Oooh, hoo, hoo.)

LEVINE: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

ZUCKERBERG: My pleasure. I'm sorry my voice is not up to par but just yesterday I came down with a stuffed nose, so.

LEVINE: Well, I really . . .

ZUCKERBERG: And I haven't had a cold in over two years.

LEVINE: So now you have one. Okay. Well, thank you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been talking with Joseph Zuckerberg, and we are here in Lake Worth, Florida on May 9, 1992.