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NATHAN FRIEDMAN
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- **KOVEL**
- **THE US: NYC, EAST HARLEM**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Nathan Friedman, who came from Poland when he was ten years old, in 1920. Today is June 6, 1992, and we're here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. I'm very happy to welcome you today.

FRIEDMAN: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: And why don't we begin by my asking you your birth date.

FRIEDMAN: My birth date is January the 5th, 1910.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

FRIEDMAN: I was born in Poland in a village called Kovel.

LEVINE: If you can spell any of these names that I might not be familiar with.

FRIEDMAN: I imagine it's spelled K-O-V-E-L, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you live in Kovel the whole time before you left for the United States?

FRIEDMAN: Yes. But of course it became, during the war it changed from Poland to Russia to Germany and down the line. Every one of them was in that village. It was a large village which had a central railroad depot, and therefore it was important for them to capture that. Finally the last ones in there was Germany. And then after the war, it was turned back to Poland.

LEVINE: I see. Now, do you remember all that?

FRIEDMAN: I vaguely remember some of the parts, yes.

LEVINE: What do you, when you think about that period of time in your life, what are the things you remember?

FRIEDMAN: Well, that period in my life was my mother, naturally, was the sole support

for all of us. She doing the, when the German occupied our town, she worked in the laundry and her fingers were all infected and they had to operate, but then they made certain gloves that fit her where she was able to keep on with her work. And, of course, my brother worked making cigarettes by hand, and I helped him by cutting the edges to smooth those out.

LEVINE: Cigarettes?

FRIEDMAN: Cigarettes, yes. And the poverty was, my mother, before she left for work, would make a pot of soup, and then, sorry. (takes a drink of water) As we got hungry we just went over and took a bowl of soup, and that was our food.

LEVINE: Why don't you tell me now your mother's name and maiden name?

FRIEDMAN: My mother's maiden name was Celia Rich. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: And your father's name?

FRIEDMAN: My father's name was Samuel Friedman. My father had gone to the United States, oh, I think it was about, perhaps about 1911, 1912, in those years, and he, after a while here in the United States he sent us tickets to come to the United States. But at that time the war broke out, and we were not able to leave.

LEVINE: I see. So you would have, he might have sent you tickets a few years after he got here.

FRIEDMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: But you weren't able to go.

FRIEDMAN: We weren't able because of the war.

LEVINE: And what about sisters and brothers?

FRIEDMAN: Well, I had one brother and one sister that came with us.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

FRIEDMAN: And, of course, we had relatives. We stayed at my father's parents' home. We lived there, and my mother had a sister in the same town.

LEVINE: And what were your sister and brother's names?

FRIEDMAN: My sister's name was Edith. My brother's name is Louis.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so you and your sister and brother and mother were living with your father's mother and father?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember the house?

FRIEDMAN: Vaguely. I have a recollection of the house, but I don't know exactly what

street or whereabouts it was.

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

FRIEDMAN: I remember it was a two story house. We had a room downstairs and, of course, the main parlor is downstairs and my grandparents had rooms, bedrooms, upstairs.

LEVINE: So their name was Friedman, too?

FRIEDMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And what were their first names?

FRIEDMAN: Uh, gosh. I don't recall it.

LEVINE: Okay. If you think of it later. So what do you remember about your grandparents?

FRIEDMAN: My grandfather, he wrote, you know, scripted, if you know the Torah. He was able to write that. And, in fact, when we left there to come to the United States, he made a pair of tefillin for me. That's the part that you say your prayers, that you put on your head, and he wrote the prayer for it inside, which I used when I became bar mitzvah here in the United States.

LEVINE: Wow. So that was one of the few things you brought with you.

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so your grandfather was a religious man.

FRIEDMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Was your whole family religious?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember celebrating any religious occasions when you were in Poland?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes. I remember the rabbi of the town. In fact, I recall that he lived across a bridge, and we went to his house. We had a synagogue there, and for the holiday prayers. And we also had lunch there after the prayers. I recall that.

LEVINE: Now, did you know the rabbi in town? Was he somebody you . . .

FRIEDMAN: We all knew the rabbi, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's see, did you go to school there?

FRIEDMAN: No. They only took one child of the family to go to school. I went to Hebrew school, but never anything else. And my sister went to school there. She was older. My brother, naturally, had to work. As I told you before, that he made cigarettes, handmade cigarettes. And I never went

to school. I went to Hebrew school.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you did for fun as a child?

FRIEDMAN: Well, I imagine the same as, we played with other children in the area. And most of the time I spent, naturally, helping my brother. I cut the edges of the cigarettes to smooth them out. But we found time for play.

LEVINE: What would you, who did your brother work for?

FRIEDMAN: I don't know who. Was it a private people, or would you call a company, that he made these cigarettes for. And he was paid for the, by the amount that he did per cigarette, you know.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular member of your family, would you say?

FRIEDMAN: Well, naturally my mother's the only one that was there, yeah. My father I never knew.

LEVINE: You didn't know him until you came here.

FRIEDMAN: No, that's right.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about your mother. What kind of a person was she?

FRIEDMAN: My mother had a tough life prior to coming to the United States. She worked hard. Before she worked in the . . .

LEVINE: Laundry?

FRIEDMAN: In the wash, washing clothing, she also did smuggling for others, which she got paid. When I say smuggling, it's from one city to another.

LEVINE: How did that work? What did she do?

FRIEDMAN: It was either money that they transferred from one city to another where she hid it on herself and made the trip, or any other, I don't recall exactly what other things that she did, but she did that for a while until the war broke out. And . . .

LEVINE: And what kind of a person, was she strict with you, was she . . .

FRIEDMAN: No, she was wonderful.

LEVINE: Gentle, or . . .

FRIEDMAN: But, as I said, she worked hard just to support us and made sure that we were well, yeah.

LEVINE: When you were leaving, do you remember what you knew about America before you actually started out to come here.

FRIEDMAN: Well, as we all heard that in America you can have anything that you wanted. It was a wonderful country. And . . .

LEVINE: Did your mother ever tell you things? Was your mother in communication with your father?

FRIEDMAN: No, we couldn't, because the war broke out. We heard nothing, we couldn't receive any financial aid from him. Nothing came through. And it wasn't till way after the war that the Jewish organization called HIAS, which was I think the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, that my father had, through them, to make sure that we were taken care of all the way to the United States. They took care of everything. Passports and tickets and all. We went to Warsaw for our passports, which they handled. My mother had to go with them, naturally. And then they took care of the fare to different places before we came to the United States. In Warsaw we were there for about a week until we got our passport.

LEVINE: Now, did they financially take care of it all, too?

FRIEDMAN: No, no. My father was taking care of it here for them, yes. But they did all of the legwork and they did all of the . . .

LEVINE: Paperwork.

FRIEDMAN: The paperwork and everything, till we actually got into the United States. It was a wonderful organization.

LEVINE: Did you know other people who had left your village or your town to come?

FRIEDMAN: No, just this cousin of ours who was in the village, and her last name was

Fingeret. I lost track of her. I don't know if she's even alive today. She came with us.

LEVINE: Do, when the decision was made that you were coming, do you remember how you felt about it?

FRIEDMAN: Vaguely. At first I was hesitant about leaving friends there, but the happiness of my mother and my sister and brother sort of brought me around to that same feeling.

LEVINE: So you were the youngest child?

FRIEDMAN: I was the youngest, yes.

LEVINE: And your sister was the oldest, or your brother?

FRIEDMAN: No, my brother is the oldest. My sister is in between. My sister was four years older than I am, and my brother is seven years older than I am.

LEVINE: Is there, when you think back to Poland now, what do you personally remember of first-hand experience with the war?

FRIEDMAN: I remember part of the war, when Germany, when the Germans came into our town. We, it was a hand encounter conflict outside of the city, and we could hear yelling and things like that. We were in a room with the shades down, you know, a blackout room. But towards morning we vividly saw one soldier on a white horse coming through slowly. He passed through. After him came three or four together, and they went

through. And then from all sides of the city the army, the soldiers came in.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt when you saw all that?

FRIEDMAN: Well, we were scared, but they assured us that everything would be fine, just to keep on doing the same. That's the way I recall, you know, being told that. And under the German occupation of our city things were not bad.

LEVINE: Was there anti-Semitism that you recall there?

FRIEDMAN: No, not at that time, no.

LEVINE: Was the city a mixture of people of all different religions?

FRIEDMAN: Yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So when you then realized you would be leaving, was there anything else that you took with you, that you remember that you brought, or maybe your brother or sister or your mother brought?

FRIEDMAN: No, I don't recall because we didn't have too much to take along. Just some of the clothing, and that's about it. And . . .

LEVINE: When you went for your passport to . . .

FRIEDMAN: Well, we went to Warsaw.

LEVINE: Warsaw.

FRIEDMAN: We took the train to Warsaw. I think it was an overnight train that we went to Warsaw. And I was looking forward, because I was told that I would see trolley cars there. And when we got to Warsaw they were on strike. (he laughs) So that ended that. And we were in Warsaw about a week.

LEVINE: And then what?

FRIEDMAN: And then we got our passports. And from Warsaw we went to, uh . . . (he pauses) Oh, I brought along just what the name of the city was.

LEVINE: Danzig?

FRIEDMAN: Danzig, yes. We went to Danzig. Danzig was a free port after the war for all nations to be able to use it. And we were in Danzig about a week. We were put up at motels and they had various doctors and nurses that examined us there, and . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about, that was from the steamship company, that did the examination?

FRIEDMAN: No. That was, I don't recall just who it was, but it was not the steamship because we didn't actually get in contact with the steamship company until we got to Liverpool.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that examination that you had in Danzig?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, I remember getting eye drops in the eyes every single day, and . . .

LEVINE: Did you have any eye problem, or . . .

FRIEDMAN: No. It was just, just as we went through. And from Danzig we took a boat to England. Where we landed, on what sea we went through, I don't recall. But we landed in England, and there we went by train to London. And it was advertised, not advertised, but it was in the papers that the first immigrants were coming through. And we got to the railroad station, people just came out in droves, and brought baskets of fruit, candy.

LEVINE: So you were made to feel very special that you were coming.

FRIEDMAN: That's right, yes. And we were in London about six hours.

LEVINE: Did you see trolley cars there?

FRIEDMAN: No, no, because we were right in the depot, you know.

LEVINE: The railroad station.

FRIEDMAN: The railroad station. And from there we continued on to Liverpool. Liverpool was a seaport, you know. And we were put up in a hotel. In fact, it was in Liverpool that we saw the first black person.

LEVINE: And what did you think? Can you recall what you thought as a ten-year-old?

FRIEDMAN: We just, we were amazed, you know. We just kept looking, yeah.

LEVINE: Was there anything else that you saw for the first time while you were making this journey?

FRIEDMAN: I don't recall. It's vague from there. We were just waiting, you know, as to when. And then we, there we were taken care of by the steamship company. It was the Cunard line. And we, the boat was the Celtic. And it took us eight days to get to the United States. And when we were told, on a Saturday morning, that we would be passing through the Statue of Liberty, and this was afternoon, we all lined the deck. And the thrill of seeing that statue there, and the tears in everybody's eyes which, as a child, got me the same feeling. It was more, not freedom of oppression, I think, but more freedom from want. So that was the biggest thrill to see that statue there. And we continued into the pier in Manhattan, the Cunard Line pier in Manhattan. First and second class passengers went through customs immediately. We, after a while, were put on a ferry. I think it was a ferry. I'm not sure just what kind of a boat it was, and we were transported to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Before we talk about Ellis Island, what were the accommodations like in steerage on the ship, the Celtic?

FRIEDMAN: Not too bad. We had a state room. My mother and sister, she had one. And when my brother and I were more in a bunk-type, you know, place.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So your mother and sister had a little cabin?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. So they weren't in steerage, in the bottom?

FRIEDMAN: No. My sister was very sick on the boat, on the whole trip. She got a fever from seasickness where she had to be attended by nurses and doctors practically twenty-four hours a day. We feared that she would not be able to make it, but thank God she made it. She came through.

LEVINE: So your fear was that she might be turned back?

FRIEDMAN: When we got here, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, so you were in a kind of a dormitory with bunk beds, you and your brother.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Down in the hold of the ship?

FRIEDMAN: That's right.

LEVINE: And what about food aboard ship?

FRIEDMAN: Well, there was a restaurant there, and they served, as I said, there were

sixty Jewish families that came across, and they served kosher food. I was like a, not a waiter, but I made sure that all of the, everything was taken care of for the sixty Jewish families, and that they had all of their kosher foods for them. And we have a wonderful captain who made sure that everything was right, yeah.

LEVINE: There were other people aboard the ship, too, besides the sixty families?

FRIEDMAN: Oh yes, yeah. These were just sixty Jewish families. Not from the same town, but from all around.

LEVINE: Did you ever stay in contact with anybody from that boat?

FRIEDMAN: No, no.

LEVINE: And do you remember, how did you spend your eight days while you were aboard ship?

FRIEDMAN: As I said, during luncheon hours I was busy setting up. And then the captain had fixed up a plate, a place for the children, and we had our fun there. As to my brother, he just passed the time as he could. My mother, naturally, was busy with my sister, who was very ill.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you remember about the voyage over that we haven't already covered?

FRIEDMAN: There's only one part that was very scary. When we left Danzig for England we had to pass a certain area where the mines had not been

removed yet. And especially at my time, they had somebody at the front of the ship, the bow of the ship, standing and watching for so that they wouldn't hit. That we heard about, you know. But the trip across itself from Liverpool to the United States, I really enjoyed it. A lot of the people, they were scared, you know, not knowing just what is going to happen.

LEVINE: But you enjoyed being aboard ship.

FRIEDMAN: Yes. But when we went up to see the movie part when we were here at Ellis Island, the one that was handling it, they asked who came through, and I raised my hand. She says, well, she was saying how scared the people was, not knowing they were going to accept. She says, "How did you feel?" I said, "I had a wonderful time." (he laughs) She couldn't understand it.

LEVINE: Well, good. Well, I suppose it was an adventure for a ten-year-old. I mean, assuming you weren't sick.

FRIEDMAN: That's right. Yes, it was.

LEVINE: Okay. So then you were transported by a ferry to Ellis Island.

FRIEDMAN: To Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Do you remember your initial impression when you came to Ellis Island?

FRIEDMAN: Well, coming in it looked like it was a loft with benches. And we were, we

put our belongings, whatever belongings we had right near us, and we sat down on the benches and we were hungry. There was, nothing was settled, but later on, I don't recall whether it was meals or just sandwiches that were brought in for us. But we did go to this main restaurant, what they called, yeah. And then at nighttime . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember the food at all here?

FRIEDMAN: No, no. I don't recall that at all.

LEVINE: Now, you waited on your own boat for a day because it was the weekend. Is that how it worked?

FRIEDMAN: No, they brought us, on Saturday they brought us to Ellis Island from the boat.

LEVINE: I see. But you just couldn't be processed because it was the weekend.

FRIEDMAN: We couldn't be processed. It was afternoon. All doctors and so were all gone. That's why we had to wait until Monday morning. At nighttime we slept in bunks. No mattresses, but it was I think three-tier bunks.

LEVINE: Canvas? Was it canvas?

FRIEDMAN: I don't think it was canvas. I know there were springs.

LEVINE: So it was uncomfortable?

FRIEDMAN: Whether it was or not I don't recall. But the feeling of being, you know, just took away that feeling of uncomfortable.

LEVINE: So was your, how would you describe your stay at Ellis Island?

FRIEDMAN: Now, the stay at Ellis Island a few days was not bad. We wandered around until Monday morning. Monday morning we were segregated and we went through different rooms. And, of course, we were very scared about my sister. And the different tests, doctors, in those rooms, that tested us. I recall in one room where doctor says, "Your name." To me. So my mother answered for me. She says, "Nathan." I recall that he told her he wanted me to answer my name so that, to see if I could speak. And of course the thrill after we all passed through and my father was waiting, and relatives of my father were waiting for us. He had already rented an apartment prior to us arriving.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt when you saw your father?

FRIEDMAN: Not really. Not really. I was a little, I thought I was a little backward then.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother told you when you were at Ellis Island or about coming to America, or . . .

FRIEDMAN: No, no, no. So very little of my mother because she was busy. On the ship, you're talking about. Because she was busy, that was my sister, yeah.

LEVINE: Then at Ellis Island were you separated from your mother and sister?

FRIEDMAN: Just at night time, yeah. That's, but she was all right once we got here, yes.

LEVINE: Your sister.

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. And when we passed through customs and my father met us in a large room where they all, visitors gathered to, and took us to an apartment that he rented in the Bronx.

LEVINE: Maybe before we continue with what happened after you left Ellis Island we'll pause for a minute so we can turn over the tape.

FRIEDMAN: Okay.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. To continue, then. After you left Ellis Island . . .

FRIEDMAN: Yeah. We, my father had rented an apartment. It was Harlem, at 118th

Street near Madison Avenue, as I recall it, one of those railroad flats. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Remember what your apartment looked like?

FRIEDMAN: Yes. As I said, it was a railroad flat. You came in to the kitchen and then from the kitchen you had a dining room, and then bedrooms from then on. And the living room was at the other end. You see, the bedrooms were at the center. And we lived there. My father, at that time, was foreman, it's before your time, they had the Ingersoll Watch Factory. At that time you could get a watch for a dollar, and any time it broke or so you'd get another one. And we were not in want then. We were comfortable.

LEVINE: How did your living quarters compare with where you had been living with your grandparents?

FRIEDMAN: Oh, entirely different, yeah. When we lived with my grandparents it was actually one room, a bedroom and the living room where we worked. The kitchen was outside. We used the same kitchen as my grandparents. This was all separate bedrooms. My brother and I shared one, my sister one and my parents one. It was a three-bedroom apartment. And then, of course, my cousins, I had cousins here and an uncle, they took us shopping for clothing, yeah. And . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember what you were wearing when you came?

FRIEDMAN: Not when I came, but I remember what I was wearing that they bought

me, and I was hoping that they would get me longer pants that I've seen, and instead I had to wear knickers. At that time that's what they wore. I resented it. I didn't care. I didn't like the knickers.

LEVINE: So, go ahead . . .

FRIEDMAN: And we had neighbors there who really took us under their wing for shopping and things. In fact, there was a neighbor that took me, I think it was in August, to register me in school. Now, I had never been to school, and I was pretty big. When I say big, by comparison to the children going to 1-A, so they couldn't put me in there. So they put me in 2-A, and I made advances from there.

LEVINE: Do you remember any incidents that have to do with learning English?

FRIEDMAN: Not learning English, no. Incidents just in playmates we make. Yeah, with it, they called me "the greenhorn" and all that, which I resented. But . . .

LEVINE: Now, were there a lot of other immigrants living in your neighborhood?

FRIEDMAN: No, no.

LEVINE: What was the neighborhood like there on 118th around Madison? Polish? Were many people of Polish . . .

FRIEDMAN: No, no, no. Mostly Jewish, and Italian, very little. But it was mostly a Jewish neighborhood.

LEVINE: Let's see. Do you remember learning to read?

FRIEDMAN: It wasn't easy, but yes. But I learned pretty fast and I went to public school.

LEVINE: Did you like school? Do you remember how you felt about school?

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yes. I liked it. And then from there I went to junior high. And junior high was in a black neighborhood. See, we lived on 118th Street and junior high was 127th Street. And it was an all black neighborhood, but we never had any incidents there. We all got along very well in those years. And from there I went to high school, and graduated high school.

LEVINE: And your brother, did he go to school?

FRIEDMAN: No, he went to night school. My sister went to school.

LEVINE: Was it the attitude of your mother and father that you become Americanized, or . . .

FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes, definitely. My parents, especially, yes.

LEVINE: Did they want to hold on to certain traditions, as well?

FRIEDMAN: Well, they held on to the Jewish tradition, but in the house mostly the language was Jewish, mostly. And, of course, celebrating of all holidays and so forth, and going to temple, yes.

LEVINE: What was it like to get to know your father when you were already ten-and-a-half years old?

FRIEDMAN: After a while I became closer.

LEVINE: It took a while.

FRIEDMAN: It took a while, yes. And I got closer, yes.

LEVINE: And what kind of a man was he? Can you describe his temperament or his character?

FRIEDMAN: He was an easygoing man, yes. And he was a, what I could say, he was a good-hearted man. When he went to temple there was a party there that was alone, he invited him for dinner at our house. And it came a holiday like Passover, there was always at least thirty, forty people at the, what they call the seder. Yeah. He was a very good-hearted man.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? Did you notice a change in her from the time that she came here after being in . . .

FRIEDMAN: Oh, yes, yes. Of course, she suffered here, too, with her eyes and . . .

LEVINE: What was wrong with her eyes?

FRIEDMAN: She had glaucoma, yeah. And when my father became ill, he had a stroke. I'm going now, passing quite a number of years. She worked

hard to take care of him.

LEVINE: But when you first came, after she was reunited with your father and you were living up there in Harlem, was she glad that you had come here?

FRIEDMAN: Yeah, she was very happy. She was very happy. She had a brother here, and a sister, and we had relatives here. And she was happy, yeah. Her life was so much easier, yeah.

LEVINE: Did she work at all once she came here?

FRIEDMAN: No, no. She did not, no.

LEVINE: And your father, he was a foreman?

FRIEDMAN: Yes. Now, when Ingersoll closed up, he went into business for himself. He had an office in Manhattan on Nassau Street, watch repair, which he did mostly for the trade people who had jewelry stores, or so. It wasn't for people off the street.

LEVINE: I see. Now, had he learned watch making and repairing in Poland, or he, that was something . . .

FRIEDMAN: No. I imagine he learned it here when he came here, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Then how about you? When did you start to work?

FRIEDMAN: I graduated high school and I went to N.Y.U. I was at N.Y.U. for maybe a

year and things got a little bad, Bank of U.S. failed at that time and money was scarce. Until they paid it off, I thought I would go out and work for a year and then come back. I don't know if you can say it, unfortunately I got a job where the window trimmer took me under his wing as a helper. And I worked with him and learned the window trimming. And at that time it was in its infancy stage where money, payment was good. As I said before, unfortunately I never went back to school. And I stayed at that profession for quite a while.

LEVINE: And what windows did you work on?

FRIEDMAN: I first worked for Alexander's. And from Alexander's, where I thought that they were going to go bankrupt at the time, I went to Hearn Department Store and I became the head, the head trimmer there. I was with Hearn's for about twenty-some odd years and they sold to an outfit called Bank of Security, and they went bankrupt, so I went into business for myself, yeah.

LEVINE: What kind of business?

FRIEDMAN: Well, while we were at Hearn's it was, they wanted to go into self-service. It was my job to see that they, what they needed for that. So I went around the country with stores that were self-service to see what apparatus and what they needed. And I decided, on conclusion, that in order to give fair services in a department store that had to have the equipment in the building to package everything, you know, that came in. Clothing was another story, but small things which all had to be in packages which had to be put out on counters. So we bought the

equipment, the machinery, and we went into self-service then. So after I, they failed and I went out, and I went into myself. I bought equipment and I went into packaging, to making the packages for the people. After a while, for about ten years it was good. But then the big fellows came along and they got equipment that overproduced ten times the amount that I could produce.

LEVINE: Would you sell to department stores?

FRIEDMAN: I would sell that to department stores, to manufacturers, who needed packaging for food or for software or for all that. So, as a result I had to go out of that business and I went into selling.

LEVINE: Wow.

FRIEDMAN: And I sold books. At first for a smaller company, then I went with Simon and Shuster in their Paperback Division. And I was with them until 1975.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when did you meet your wife?

FRIEDMAN: My first wife passed away in I think it was 1973. Martha I'd known, oh, we lived in the same neighborhood before that, and we were very good friends, her husband, Martha, my wife and myself. We were very close friends. We used to go on vacations together, you know. After my wife, Martha lost her husband quite a few years before that and we were close, we still kept in touch with one another and we were together. And then after my wife passed away, about two years after, if it wasn't for Martha I wouldn't have remarried again. But we knew one another very well and

it's been wonderful years. We married in 1975.

LEVINE: Great. Now, do you have children?

FRIEDMAN: I have a son that lives in Florida.

LEVINE: And what's his name?

FRIEDMAN: His name is Leonard. He lives in Miami. And two grandchildren, a boy and a girl, Scott and Sandy. Sandy is the older one, the girl, yeah.

LEVINE: Of all the things you've done in your life, what are you proudest of? (he pauses) Well, maybe that's too strong. Is it, can you think of something that you've done in your life that makes you feel proud when you think of it?

FRIEDMAN: Well, it's hard to say, but right now I'm affiliated with B'nai B'rith. And our lodge, we're all in Royal Palm Beach, which, we're a group of eight men and we met in the same area, lived in the same area. We call ourselves "the schvitzers". We go to the, what do you call it again? Spa. We go to the spa regularly, and then we socialize. So we're now B'nai B'rith chapter, lodge, rather, in Royal Palm had gone under. The eight of us decided we would take it over, start it all over again and we would be the workers. And this is about nine, ten years ago, and we built it up. Nobody else wants the job. We still have to keep doing it, and we've been doing a pretty good job up till now, and that was an achievement.

LEVINE: Yes.

FRIEDMAN: I am chairman of A.D.L. That's the Anti-Defamation League. Which I make a report at every single meeting. I go to various meetings to know what is going on.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you're having an interesting time.

FRIEDMAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: At this time in your life.

FRIEDMAN: And the women of this group are all, they all get along very well. We play bridge together. We go away various places, and we socialize very nicely.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, considering where you started in Poland and your early life, and then coming to this country, is there anything that you would say as a result of having been through that kind of change in your life, from your early life to . . .

FRIEDMAN: To this life?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FRIEDMAN: Oh, it was a definite complete change. As I said when I started, when we saw the Statue of Liberty, to us it was freedom from want because we didn't have anything there. Yet you came in here and, as I said, my father was not a rich man, but we didn't fear of not having the next meal,

you know, which we did in Poland.

LEVINE: And maybe you could describe on tape how you felt when you visited Ellis Island last year?

FRIEDMAN: Well, I had mentioned that I would love to go back to see it, you know. And Johnny, who's got a heart of gold.

LEVINE: Johnny?

FRIEDMAN: Johnny Ross, John Ross. He says, "Why not?" So he and Carol, his wife, took Martha and me to Ellis Island and before that they had sent away and got a plaque, yeah. And we got on the ferry and came to Ellis Island and it was a wonderful feeling. And that feeling until we saw where our plaque was, and we went down to see it, and I looked and there was the name right on the wall. Everything just, it was hard to describe, really, that feeling.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think maybe this is a good place to stop.

FRIEDMAN: All right.

LEVINE: I want to thank you so much for sharing all your reminiscences.

FRIEDMAN: I feel very honored in giving me this opportunity.

LEVINE: Well, this is what the Oral History Project is all about, people like you and the history that you lived.

FRIEDMAN: And thank you very much.

LEVINE: You're very welcome. Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's June 6, 1992 and I've been here with Nathan Friedman who came from Poland when he was ten in 1920.

END OF INTERVIEW