

EI-239

ROSE GARBER BACKMAN

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 27, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: 12/8/1992

RUNNING TIME: 1:02:49

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: DAUGHTERS OF MIRIAM HOME, CLIFTON,
NJ**

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 4/1994

POLAND, 1923

RESIDENCE: VESELKALETOVSK

AGE 11

US RESIDENCE: BRONX, NY

PORT OF EMBARKATION:

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm in Clifton, New Jersey today with Rose Garber Backman who came from Poland in 1923 when she was eleven-and-a-half. Today is December 8, 1992, and we're here in Clifton, New Jersey. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and we've just been discussing the fact that you have your written story, but we'll just speak it as we go.

BACKMAN: Fine. It's still the same story. It's my story. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Good, good. Okay. Why don't you start by telling me the town you were born in?

BACKMAN: I was born in, I was born in Poland, Veselkaletowsk. And at that time they were, of course, like enjoying killing the Jews, and so the, whoever was able to run away from Poland and had the opportunity, they ran. My mother was a very capable woman. She used to stay in the store with her parents, help them out. Because my father, of course, didn't want to be drafted into the army, so he went to America, as did most of the young men. In fact, he had three brothers, they also all left for America. But my father came to, well, my father came to America, and his brothers went to, gee, I've almost forgotten where.

LEVINE: South America?

BACKMAN: South America, yes.

LEVINE: Could you tell me, first, what year you were born, your birth date?

BACKMAN: I was born August 27, 1911.

LEVINE: And what year was it that your father came to America? Do you remember?

BACKMAN: Um, (she pauses) It must, it was 1911 when I was born. And I was, oh, I don't know, about, perhaps about eight years

of age. And my mother took my brother and myself and left Poland to go to Russia. Before she did that she put her parents into a horse and wagon and drove them out of the outskirts, out of Poland to be, to keep them safe in the outskirts of Poland. And then she took my brother and myself, she returned, took my brother and myself, and left for Russia. And the name of the city was Crimea, Yevpatoriya. And this is where I've been with, remained there for many years. And my father, who was in America, was trying to reach, find his family. So he knew that we were in America somewhere because that was the only place that people were able to run to. So we had, a mailman carried around a letter from America from one place to another, and gave it over to other mailmen, whoever was available to, or who was going from one place to another, so that the piece of mail, because it was from America, was treasured by every mailman whoever received it, and so that's the way they were trying to locate the family. My father's name was Garber.

LEVINE: And his first name?

BACKMAN: Israel Garber. So this happened, this happened so long ago (she laughs) it's almost difficult to recollect. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: Could we back up just for a minute. Before you left Poland, you were there till, say, you were eight or thereabouts?

BACKMAN: All right. Eight, or perhaps even, yeah, eight, I suppose, nine.

LEVINE: Did you go to school while you were in Poland at all?

BACKMAN: Uh, no. We went, we left for Russia. We didn't stay too long in Poland because, well, the Jews were always in the way, and they always tried, they always killed Jews there. And whoever had the opportunity to go out of the town. And so my mother was a very, she was tall, blonde, beautiful, and she was a very capable person. So she took her parents, my grandparents, drove them to the outskirts of the town, because there it was safe, and then came back for us. She took my brother and myself to Russia.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

BACKMAN: We were able to get a train and, of course, it took us a long time to go there, because it didn't take too long after it drove out, after the train left the station. We were thrown off onto a field, and we remained there. Another train came along with soldiers. When I say soldiers, with commanders with, I remember some of them were wearing those high boots. I mean, I guess they were in charge of the soldier unit. My

brother and I were very, we were good-looking children, and we had very nice voices. I don't know what happened to my voice now. When I try to sing you just (she laughs) it doesn't work so well. At any rate, when that train had pulled in with those soldiers and the very, oh, the commanders with their red boots, they looked so important, especially I was never a tall person, so to me it looked like they were generals from heaven. But when, as I repeat myself, my mother was a very beautiful woman. So when those big shots used to walk through the fields and my brother and I were always singing. So it didn't take too long before the soldiers or the commanders had to leave on their train. They didn't want to leave us behind, so they helped my brother and myself onto their train and then pushed my mother on, on the platform, as the train was already moving. As it traveled for, oh, maybe an hour or so or more the train was stopped and we were thrown off the train onto another field. No sooner did the train start again when the same commander reached down and pushed us on the platform again, and so I remember how my brother and myself were kneeling. We were kneeling on the floor and resting our heads on the chair, on the bench. And we were praying that they should let us stay, remain on the train, that they shouldn't stop the train again. And it continued, and we were able to arrive to Poland where my grandparents lived.

LEVINE: Now, you, these were Polish Army military people?

BACKMAN: Well, it was in Russia. We left, we left Russia.

LEVINE: To go from Russia to Poland.

BACKMAN: The train was going, that's right. It was driving back. It was going back. So I never thought that I'd have to remember what happened so many, many, many years ago.

LEVINE: Was your mother able to get on that train, too?

BACKMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember the, I know you say your voice isn't in such good form but can you remember the songs that you sang as a child?

BACKMAN: One little song. (she sings in Russian) That means oh, yabliushka. Yabliushka is an apple. Where could that, (she sings in Russian), where are you rolling? Because when you arrive in Sevastopol you'll never be able to return. (she sings in Russian) You won't be able to return. And believe it or not I used to speak only Russian, and I completely forgot Russian. I learned Yiddish. I wasn't able to speak Jewish at all, of course.

It was only Russian. But here I had to learn either English or Jewish, and it seemed that Jewish came much quicker to me. So I learned the Jewish language, and English followed. I was put into the sixth grade because I knew math, arithmetic, and that's the same in any language. So I was tested and I was put into the sixth grade. After that I, of course I wasn't a baby any more. I must have been already thirteen, fourteen years of age, fifteen. I don't remember exactly. However, in order to go to work I learned to be a stenographer typist. I took a commercial course. So I worked, I got a job and I worked. I'm trying to remember what type of a company it was, but I don't remember. Anyway, gee, I haven't thought of this, this story. I left it behind me so many years ago. Finally I met, I'm trying to remember how I met my husband. I belonged to a Misrahi organization. (she laughs) Ages ago. I met my husband. At that time my folks, my mother was a very capable woman, as I mentioned before. She was a business lady, and she felt, my father worked in a shop as a cap maker. He never had to provide for his family because we were never together. He was in America. He left for America not to have to serve in the army as his brothers did. And my mother was a business lady. She had been a businesswoman in Poland. And my father was a yeshiva bocha. He learned in a parochial, in a yeshiva, all those years. So, I'm trying to collect my thoughts.

LEVINE: I am a little confused. If I could ask a few questions.

BACKMAN: Yes, go ahead.

LEVINE: Now, you were born in Poland.

BACKMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And you stayed there, and you didn't go to school there, but then you went to Russia.

BACKMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Where you did go to school.

BACKMAN: Well, I went to school, in fact, the only way I started school was because I saw some other children were going to school. So I ran after them. I didn't know where they were going, but a group of children were going, so I went with them, and I went into, with them into the school. Of course, my mother hadn't known where I went, but that's how I started school. I went to school there not for long, because we kept on going from one place to another.

LEVINE: Now, why was it? Why did you keep moving?

BACKMAN: Because, my mother was very unhappy because she had to leave us alone. She started, she used to stay in the market selling, selling sugar and candy to earn some sort of a livelihood. But she used to leave us alone, of course. And so one day a man knocked on the door. I opened the door, and the man looked like Santa Claus. He was bearded with a long beard, the facial beard. And when my brother saw him, he started crying. That man looked like Santa Claus, and it frightened him. And after that incident my brother became tongue-tied. After that he couldn't speak normally without, uh, what would you say?

LEVINE: Is it a stutter?

BACKMAN: Stuttering, yes. (she laughs) I was trying to think of the word. And so he became a stutterer. But as I say, my father was trying to reach us to find us. And so finally a letter carrier came to our, when I say yard it was a huge, huge yard, very big. You can imagine how big it was when horse and wagons were able to roll into the yard. And above that there was a balcony, a winding balcony with doors leading onto the balcony from the apartments.

LEVINE: This was in Russia now?

BACKMAN: Yes. This was in Russia. And when the letter came it was a letter from America, from my father. And that letter told us that his sister lived in, I don't know, Yakatarinaslov. And his sister has a ticket for us to come to America. My father sent the ticket to his sister, that if she would ever see us to give us this ticket so that we can go to America.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother's reaction when she got that letter?

BACKMAN: (she pauses) It was almost unbelievable. She couldn't imagine that my father was able to locate us that way without an official address. But at that time when any piece of mail came from America the letters, the letter carriers used to carry it around as if it was a piece of diamond, because whoever heard from America at that time. So that's how my mother was able to go back to Poland and from Poland, (she pauses) I guess we were able to connect because my father used to write from America to his family who were in Poland.

LEVINE: Do you remember your grandparents from, in Poland?

BACKMAN: I remember my grandmother, my grandfather, and my father.

LEVINE: How, do you remember any experiences with either your grandmother or grandfather?

BACKMAN: I remember, well, my grandfather, my grandmother at that time used to help out all the poor people with food. So my grandmother used to take me along with her into, to visit people in, well, it was in Poland. So she used to collect food parcels from other people in Poland. And then one day a week there were lines to my grandfather's, grandmother's door. She used to distribute the food parcels that we had, that my grandmother and I used to go around collecting in order to be able to distribute it to the poor people.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that your grandmother told you, things that she wanted you to know, or . . .

BACKMAN: Well, nothing special except there was, she was brooding before we arrived. In fact, when we were in Russia a man had stopped, this was like a hundred years ago. A man had stopped to speak to my mother, and she told him who we were, because we were very, our family name was a very, uh, what shall I say, a very prominent name. In fact, the name was Leah Braditsky, and the Braditsky family was a very elegant family.

LEVINE: This was your mother's maiden name, Braditsky?

BACKMAN: Braditsky, yes. Of course, then when she married my father it became Garber. And after I got married it became Backman. So this man walked for miles and miles and miles from Russia, and that was the man who had befriended us, so he knew us and he knew about us, and he knew who the family was in Poland. The man walked from Russia to Poland. It took him months to walk. The reason that he arrived safely to Poland was because he was an old man, so he wasn't bothered on the way. If he was a young man, he would never have made it because they didn't let any young people out.

LEVINE: Was this the bearded man?

BACKMAN: Uh . . .

LEVINE: How did you know this man from Russia?

BACKMAN: He was just one of the people that my mother had met. She met a lot of people. So when this man returned by way of a cemetery in Poland, my grandmother was bemoaning in the cemetery. She was bemoaning the fact that now she is, she is at a funeral by her son, she said. It was a cemetery, I guess. And no doubt she doesn't know whatever happened to her daughter with the children. So she was bemoaning the fact that

not knowing where her daughter and the children are, and she's burying a son, and that man was the one who had befriended us a long time ago, and he told her that we are alive and we'll be trying to return to her, to Poland. And my father was trying to locate us. As I say, a piece of mail from America was a piece of treasure. He had a sister there in another part near Warsaw, I guess. I don't remember the exact town. And there she also had received mail that my father was trying to locate us. And we had received the ticket through the sister that would have allowed us to go to America.

LEVINE: These years that you were going back and forth between Russia and Poland, was that like . . .

BACKMAN: Not really going back and forth.

LEVINE: Well, you went, you went to Poland when you were about, let's say, eight or so.

BACKMAN: Yes. And then we went to Russia.

LEVINE: No, wait. You were in Poland when you were born, and then you went to Russia when you were about eight, or before that?

BACKMAN: (she pauses) You think I remember?

LEVINE: You went to school in Russia, though.

BACKMAN: We went to school. Yeah, I started. Because I saw children going, going to school. I just ran after them.

LEVINE: And that was, did you go, like, into the first grade, do you remember? And how many years did you go to school?

BACKMAN: Not, not many years.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that school where you went?

BACKMAN: No. I was, look, would you believe me? I don't remember Russian any more, and that was the language that I spoke there. I didn't know Jewish, but when I came to Poland I decided, or because my mother never spoke Jewish with me. Because in Russia, in fact, we weren't even known to be Jews. My mother, as I said, my mother was a tall, blonde, beautiful woman. She looked like a real Gentile, what they call them? Schiksas. She used to walk around barefooted, just like all the schiksas did in Russia.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Did you ever have any anti-Semitic actions against you or your

family?

BACKMAN: No, no. We didn't have that kind of experience, then.

LEVINE: Did you witness any, any of that, while you were there?

BACKMAN: No.

LEVINE: So your father was making caps when he was in Poland?

BACKMAN: He was taken, no. (she coughs) When he came to America he had no trade. His brothers had arrived before him some years before. In fact, one brother went to Africa, and my father's brother, one brother went to Africa and one brother went to America, to New York. (she coughs) (she pauses) I never dreamt . . . (break in tape)

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now after a drink of water. Did you get any water? (voice off mike) No, thank you. Okay.

BACKMAN: I have some juice if you like.

LEVINE: No, I'm fine, thanks. Okay. So were there any things you remember about your grandfather?

BACKMAN: No. I'd never seen him.

LEVINE: That was your father's father?

BACKMAN: My, my, no. She was, my mother's grandmother.

LEVINE: And your mother's father. Uh-huh. I see. And you never . . .

BACKMAN: This gentleman. (showing a photograph)

LEVINE: Is your father.

BACKMAN: That's my father.

LEVINE: Now, did you ever know your father's parents?

BACKMAN: No.

LEVINE: No. Okay. And how about your . . .

BACKMAN: They were in another town.

LEVINE: How about your brother? What was his name?

BACKMAN: Morris.

LEVINE: Morris. And . . .

BACKMAN: Morris Garber.

LEVINE: There were just the two of you, you and your brother. Uh-huh.

And do you remember any experiences with your brother when you were growing up before you came here.

BACKMAN: My brother and I, we got along beautifully. I remember he used to give me a pat, "Hi, sister." (they laugh) Yeah. It was a long time ago.

LEVINE: And what kind of a personality was your brother?

BACKMAN: He was a very capable person. There wasn't anything that he wasn't able to do. (she pauses) It's hard to put together. Anything you wanted you had to ask him and it was done. No matter what, it made no difference to him. There wasn't anything that he wasn't capable of doing.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about America before you actually got here? Do you remember what you'd heard, or what ideas you had about it before you came?

BACKMAN: No, not really. They used to call it The Golden Medina.

LEVINE: The Golden?

BACKMAN: The Golden Land.

LEVINE: Ah. Uh-huh.

BACKMAN: The impression was that on every corner you'd find a golden spittoon. Look, those were hearsay, but people over there thought it was so.

LEVINE: Do you remember how your mother felt or thought about coming when it was decided that you could come?

BACKMAN: My mother was very happy at the thought of it. And then when we were able to get passage or get the ticket, whatever, to go on the boat to America from Ellis Island I'll tell you . . .

LEVINE: Well, you would have left . . .

BACKMAN: So that when we arrived here my father came to get us, and at first it seems they didn't know where we were, so he left. And then he came back the following day. So then he found us. And he took us. Would you believe that I still remember the address where we lived in the Bronx? 854 East 170th Street near Wilkins Avenue. I don't remember anything. This, I remember. Many times I think something's the matter with me. Why would I remember the house that we lived in, not the house, the apartment. It was up on a hill. The way I used to put on roller skates and run, roll down the hill.

LEVINE: Do you remember what the apartment looked like inside?

BACKMAN: Oh, I remember it was lit up beautifully. It was a gorgeous apartment. Who would ever dream coming off the boat, off the, to come into a place. It was a four-room apartment. I used to have a sister-in-law. She was here. I mean, she was in America, and so she furnished, had the apartment furnished, had it furnished for my father. So it was a beautiful four-room apartment. I can still remember it. It was 854 East 170th Street.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you first met your father again, when you had a reunion with him?

BACKMAN: Well, he didn't exactly look like the father I left.

LEVINE: What was the difference?

BACKMAN: Well, years pass. He was alone here. I guess he didn't have his wife to take care of him. My father was a thin individual. I'm going to show you my . . .

LEVINE: Do you know we forgot, we're breaking here for a moment. (break in tape) Okay. So we're resuming now. You said that your father was not what you expected, he didn't look as well cared for as you remembered.

BACKMAN: No. He was very, well. No, not as I had remembered

him. Because I didn't see much of him.

LEVINE: You really probably didn't remember him very well because you hadn't seen him.

BACKMAN: I didn't know my father.

LEVINE: Was it strange being in the family unit with your father having been just with your mother all those years?

BACKMAN: No. At that time when we came back, as I say, my father was a, worked in a shop as a cap maker. He didn't earn too much of a livelihood. My mother was a very capable businesswoman, because she had to fend for herself and her children in Russia. Not only for that reason, she happened to be a very capable person. And your father was a yeshiva bocha. He knew his books, the Torah, the readings. So when we came from the other side, after he had picked us up at Ellis Island, well, that was, he had lived in the Bronx then. But after a while, it didn't take too long, maybe a couple of years, you know. Two, three years. So my mother decided somebody has to earn the livelihood, because what my father earned in the shop wasn't anything to write home about. She had a cousin who had lived close by in Brooklyn. How did we get to Brooklyn?

LEVINE: Subway?

BACKMAN: She, no. (she laughs) Besides, I was just thinking. I really don't remember. However, this cousin had a grocery store. So she told my mother a few blocks from her store there's another store for sale. So it would be advisable for my mother to become a grocery lady. And so that's, that's how we arrived. That's how we arrived to Brooklyn. And my mother had taught my father to become a grocery man also. And so he stayed in the grocery. There were three, there were three rooms in back of the store. From the store there were three steps leading up to the three-room apartment. So for us it was fine. There were, like, two bedrooms and a large kitchen. In fact, also in the store, in the back, before we, before the three-room, the three steps up to the apartment there was a little kitchen. So my mother used to do the cooking there and be in the store at the same time, there was a sink, right there in the store, in back of the store, which had the three steps that led to the apartment, so it was very convenient.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences learning English when you got here?

BACKMAN: I was pretty good at taking over language. Although

when I entered school the children tried to speak to me in Yiddish. But I picked up the English language very quickly because I was not comfortable with the children who really didn't know how to speak Jewish tried to speak to me, so I decided that's not my cup of tea. That can't be. They can hardly speak to me in Jewish, so I decided I'd better learn to speak English very quickly so that they wouldn't have difficulty in communicating with me. Which I did, I did pretty well. They put me into the 4-B because I knew arithmetic, and that's one language that everybody understands. So they put me into the 4-B. And then I, from one class to another I went into junior high school. And when I finished that I went to, they called it Woods Business College. It was a business school, but that was the name of it. So I learned, took up this business course, sten and typing. And I became a secretary in a plumbing supply place on De Kalb Avenue. So I'm trying to think how . . .

LEVINE: Then you met your husband?

BACKMAN: How I met my husband. Oh, where my folks had a grocery around the corner was a window shade and venetian blind store, and there were three sons there. The Backmans, the name was Backman. And she used to come in, the mother used to come into my folk's grocery store, which was around

the corner, because the venetian blind store was around the corner, was on Livonia and Christopher. My folks' grocery was on Christopher near Livonia. So she decided that I should pick any one of her three sons because she's not going to let me go. I have to become her daughter-in-law. (she laughs) I'll never forget the way she decided, and she was some lady. You couldn't tell her what to do. She told . . .

LEVINE: Why had she taken to you so much?

BACKMAN: Because she thought I was very nice.

LEVINE: I see. She just knew you from the neighborhood.

BACKMAN: No, from the grocery. She used to come into the grocery to do some shopping, which was around the corner from her store. When I say "her," she lived upstairs, they lived upstairs. And my husband lived with his brothers, of course they all lived upstairs, so they used to work in the store, in the window shade store.

LEVINE: So on what basis did you choose your husband rather than his two brothers?

BACKMAN: Because the mother-in-law had decided he was the oldest, so first you have to marry off the oldest. (they laugh)

So I, okay. Well, he was a very nice person. In fact, when I used to go to the beach with some friends, I don't know how. You know, when you start thinking back it's too way back. So my husband would always be near me on the sand. I used to say to him, "How did you know where I was?" I went with girls, with my friends. I never knew how he appeared on the beach near me. Where did he come from? How did he know where? So it's, when you start thinking back it's really very, it's strange and it's funny.

LEVINE: Let me just fill in something, because we're getting near the end of this tape. You came on the Carmania.

BACKMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And where did you leave from? Do you remember what port?

BACKMAN: It must have been Warsaw.

LEVINE: Warsaw. Um, I think you would have had to go from Warsaw to someplace else. But you said you were supposed to leave on the Aquitania.

BACKMAN: Yes, but we came on the Carmania.

LEVINE: Do you know what . . .

BACKMAN: No, nothing. We had no choice. We had no, we were supposed to go on one boat, but instead they sent another boat whether you like it or not. It wasn't a question of choice.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about the voyage?

BACKMAN: I remember that the boat was, it seems there was a hole in the boat, and water was coming into the boat, and the boat was filling up with water. So my mother put my brother and myself on the tables. Maybe that will be a prevention from drowning. But, of course, they worked very hard trying to close up that, wherever the opening was. And so we were saved.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

BACKMAN: Well, I remember, I remember it was a beautiful experience, and they took us to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Do you remember your impressions of that?

BACKMAN: I was very happy to have arrived on land, and Ellis Island was a beautiful home for us. It seems my father came once and he didn't find us. Of course, I didn't know who he was. I didn't know what he looked like. But then the following day he came again and he finally found us. And that's when he took us

to the Bronx to his apartment, and his apartment was beautifully lit up. It was so bright and so clean, and everything was so new. I didn't believe such places existed. And, I'm trying to remember. I remember the address. I remember we lived up a hill. I had gotten some skates, rollerskating, rollerskates, and I used to rollerskate down, down the hill. This was on East 170th Street and Wilkins Avenue, so we rolled. I rolled down the hill on my skates.

LEVINE: Do you remember any, were skates something that you never had before?

BACKMAN: No, I learned. It didn't take long. I used to fall many times, but you learn these things, especially when, more or less being a youngster.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that were new to you that struck you as different or unusual when you first came? You know, things you hadn't seen over in Europe that . . .

BACKMAN: Well, I don't know that it was so unusual. I know the apartment was very beautiful. It was very lit up. It was so bright and shiny, and all the furniture was new. As I say, my sister, uh, sister-in-law was the one who fixed up the apartment so it was very beautiful, very bright and very shiny and very

new. But after a while my mother had to, although my father worked in the shop, but the shop had closed up eventually, so my mother had to earn a livelihood. Because my father was in one shop for years and years and years. As I say, he was a yeshiva bocha. He never had to support a family before. So it was not an easy task for him. And my mother, to my mother it was no problem. She always took care of us. And we lived through, I don't know, trials and tribulations and whatever.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family? Did you observe?

BACKMAN: No. We were glad we had whatever it was to eat then. And my mother was not a religious person. She didn't really have (?) to be a religious person, because in Russia, in Russia you weren't even supposed to be Jews. In fact, you used to walk around like a real schiksa, she was tall, blonde and beautiful. And they used to wear wooden, they used to call it chadulias, with bands. The bottom was wooden.

LEVINE: Like clogs?

BACKMAN: Clogs. I didn't even know what you call it. Exactly that. So who had shoes? That was a luxury. But . . .

LEVINE: Were your mother and father happy to have come here?

BACKMAN: Yes, of course. But as I say my mother knew business. My father wasn't a businessman. He was a yeshiva bocha. He learned, he knew to open up the books, the Torahs. But my mother decided in order to earn a livelihood the best bet would be for her to open up a grocery, and a cousin of hers had met us who had a grocery, and she said, "A little distance away there's another grocery for sale." And my mother should buy the grocery, and that's what happened. We bought the grocery. And we lived at 396 Christopher Avenue in Brooklyn in back of the grocery. That was an apartment, a three-room apartment. And so we stayed there. And we were there for many years.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father become citizens?

BACKMAN: My father became a citizen right away when he came to America. And my mother became a citizen on his papers. The wife becomes automatically a citizen. Although the children, I don't remember whether the children became citizens, but because the mother was, so. That is, if I can dream about it or think about it. It's really ancient history.

LEVINE: Well, when you think back about, you know, being born in Poland and living in Russia and coming here, how do you think about that now?

BACKMAN: I tell you something, I don't think about it at all. I'm glad not to have to think back to have those memories. They weren't, the memories weren't the lap of luxury. It was very difficult. I went through a very difficult period. My growing up wasn't a bed of roses. So it's nice just to put everything behind.

LEVINE: Do you have any fond memories of life in Europe?

BACKMAN: Not especially. There was nothing fond there. We were on a starvation diet. So believe me, you can't miss anything like that. We didn't have a crumb of bread to eat for a long, long time.

LEVINE: You mentioned the famine before you left. What do you remember about that.

BACKMAN: I remember that a man was carrying a little piece of bread in his palm of the hand, and the people were like animals. Starvation took over everything. If they'd find a horse in the street they would kill the horse and eat the meat. My memories from Russia were not very pleasant. I'm glad to put them behind me. I don't know the situations now, but I'm happy to be in America.

LEVINE: Well, before we close, would you just mention your husband's

full name and your childrens' names?

BACKMAN: My husband's name was Abraham. I have two daughters, God bless them. Her name is Zelda, (gesturing to her daughter in the room) although she's very unhappy that I named her Zelda. The reason that I named her Zelda was because that was my father's mother's name. And Leah. They're both, I decided that they're not going to ask for a handout from their husbands when they get married. I want . . .
(tape ends)