

EI-255

SONJA (SARAH) LIFSHITZ DARDIK

BIRTH DATE: JULY 1, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: 2/24/1993

RUNNING TIME: 23:45

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: DAUGHTERS OF MIRIAM HOME  
CLIFTON, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 6/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 10/1994

RUSSIA, CIRCA 1921

APPROXIMATELY AGE 15

SHIP AND PORT NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCES: RUSSIA: BEREZINO

US: LONG BRANCH, NJ

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service,  
and I'm here today. It's February 24, 1993, and I'm  
here with Sonja Lifshitz Dardik, who was born in  
Russia . . .

DARDIK: That's right, in a small, a very small town.

LEVINE: In a small town in Russia.

DARDIK: A very small town, very small.

LEVINE: In July, and it was either 1901 or 1902, which we're  
going to check later. She came to this country at  
about age fifteen, and I just want to say whatever you  
can remember is fine, and whatever you don't remember  
is fine, too. ( break in tape )

DARDIK: I started, we started out from Russia, you know, and we passed Poland and Germany, you know, we had to stop there. And we stopped in England also, for a short time, because the other two, we stopped, well, that was, let's say, for a week or so. But in England we stopped for a short time and we came here.

LEVINE: Well, let's start out with the little town. What was the name of that little town in Russia. Do you remember?

DARDIK: Berezino, Berezina.

LEVINE: Will you spell it please?

DARDIK: ( she laughs ) I don't know if I spell it right.

LEVINE: As best you can, yeah.

DARDIK: B-E-R-E-Z-I-N-O. O or A, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay. And describe the town. What was it like there?

DARDIK: Well, that's, I was born, that was a very small town. After a while I was about four or five years old, we moved to a bigger city, but when I was born in a very small town which was, my mother had a brother there, and he was a businessman, you know. So, but I wasn't, at that time I was just nothing. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: You don't remember that little town too well. Do you

remember anything about it, or what do you remember?

DARDIK: Something like (?). I don't know. It's very, there's nothing to it. You know, it was a small town, and there was a river, and, well, we used to go swimming there. And we lived there for quite a while, until we moved to Berezino. So it's in my head someplace ( she laughs ), but I don't think about it so much.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in there?

DARDIK: It was a plain, ordinary and nothing to be ( she laughs ) excited about. It, but it was a house that belonged to my parents, see. And how was it there? We had, it was private, you know. It belonged to my parents, because it was only two rooms, three rooms, I think. One was like a kitchen, and it was very small.

LEVINE: What did your father do?

DARDIK: My father was, I don't know if you'll know what it means. My father was a Hebrew teacher, and he was taking care of a lot of children, so, in Hebrew.

LEVINE: You mean he was teaching Hebrew to a lot of children?

DARDIK: Oh, yeah, yeah. He ( she laughs ), he couldn't read or write or talk in English ( she laughs ) at that time.

LEVINE: And how many children were in your family?

DARDIK: Well, we were six of us. We were one brother, but very, very, how should I say. And five girls. So the girls, they were, they, in a short time they all go in America, at that time.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

DARDIK: Lifshitz, I told you.

LEVINE: His first name?

DARDIK: Oh, Ruven, Ruven. I don't know his name. In Hebrew it was Ruven.

LEVINE: Ruven?

DARDIK: Yeah. But that was my father's name.

LEVINE: And how about your mother, her name?

DARDIK: My mother. ( she laughs ) I'm telling you, it's so funny. So many years, I just don't think about it.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about your mother. What was she like when you were a little girl?

DARDIK: My mother was a business lady, because she did business, was a little, in the same house, you know. They couldn't possibly do something or whatever, so, I mean, in business. So she, people, they, not the people, they, how should I say that? She was, here it

would be a restaurant, but that place was no restaurant because they, the people that came in, they were, you know, for a cup of, uh, I don't know. I wasn't born yet. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: They would come in to your home, essentially.

DARDIK: To . . .

LEVINE: And they would have coffee or . . .

DARDIK: Yes, or a drink or some bread. I don't know. As I said, it's too long, a long time already and, uh, I wasn't born yet. ( break in tape ) At that time I was a child. I couldn't say a word in Russian. And so we lived there until I was about five or six years old. And from there we, let's see. We went to a big city from that place.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's talk about life in that bigger city. Do you remember the house you lived in there?

DARDIK: I have an idea, that that was a, let's see. The bigger city was also not so big. But, you know, we used to, I could start a little bit reading, a little bit of whatever it was.

LEVINE: Did your mother still have a little business going?

DARDIK: Yeah. She had kind of a store, let's say, that she used to bake bread to sell for the Christians there. But it was all in a small, how should I say that

( she laughs ). I never think of it. I don't remember. But this is what I remember from the little town that my mother used to bake bread and sell there for the Christians. And she had certain other things, you know, for them. And then we moved to the bigger city. That was a little different already.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food that your mother cooked that you particularly liked when you were a little girl?

DARDIK: No. Did you ever hear of a chonk?

LEVINE: No. How do you spell it?

DARDIK: ( she laughs ) I don't know. I never learned it.

LEVINE: Well, what is it?

DARDIK: This is when they put potatoes and, what do you call it, I forgot. I never think of it. I forgot. But this was chonk. They used to put in a part of potatoes and, uh, beblach. How do you say that in English? My goodness. This you put in the stove Friday and it stays overnight. Did you hear about this?

LEVINE: No.

DARDIK: They used to, because it was, you know, a small town, and there wasn't too much. But, so they used to put potatoes and beblach. What do you call beblach in English? ( she laughs ) I'm telling you, I don't use

them, I forget. But this was for, and then leave it in the oven. They used to leave it in the oven for overnight to have for the next day. So that was it. But otherwise . . .

LEVINE: What was your mother like when you were a little girl? How would you describe your mother?

DARDIK: My mother was a very nice lady, and she, my father didn't work so much because he had his job, and his job was taking care of, he used to kill the chickens. You know what a shochet is? Well, that was my father. So for the, all around, he was the one. So . . .

LEVINE: Would he go to people's, to people's homes, or where would he be when he was doing this?

DARDIK: No. They, well, each one brought the chicken, let's say, or whatever, I don't know that, chicken or turkey. So he used to kill it. And that was a shochet, they used to call. Even now, the same thing. So he used to do that, and my mother used to bake bread, you know, for herself, and then people came in, so she sold them. ( she laughs ) I don't remember. I mean, I do remember what was talking about, but to say that I helped or, I was too small yet, a little girl, a little girl. And then they moved to the bigger city, so that was a little bit different already. So . . .

LEVINE: How was it decided that you would move to America?

( disturbance in the microphone ) Why did the family decide to come?

DARDIK: Why did they decide to come? Because I had had two sisters and a brother. Because they were much older than I was, you know. I was a good-for-nothing. ( she laughs ) And they were already went to America. So that's how it was. So we lived in that smaller town, that bigger town. The little one was nothing. And my parents had like a store, a small one, you know. They are little. ( break in tape ) And that was it. So . . .

LEVINE: So who came to America with you?

DARDIK: With me? My parents, myself, and my younger sister. The four of us. But we had already here two sisters and a brother, because they ( she laughs ), they left way before. See, they left because it was not the place for them. So they came here, and they, I don't know what they did, because I wasn't here. I wasn't with them. But they worked and they, and they started to, started something here.

LEVINE: Now, when you say it was not a place for them what do you mean, why they left? When you say your brothers, your brother and sisters left?

DARDIK: They left because they didn't like that, it was not for them. They were looking for something better. But, and I wasn't born yet, even, when they left. So . . . ( break in tape )

LEVINE: . . . saying, when you came to this country you went to school for a little while, and then you stopped.

DARDIK: A very small place. First of all, I wasn't in a big city, so the schools were different.

LEVINE: Where were you when you moved to America? Where did you live?

DARDIK: I lived in Long Branch.

LEVINE: New Jersey?

DARDIK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your father continued to teach Hebrew?

DARDIK: Well, that was, my father, but what has he got to do.

LEVINE: And then you married your husband, who was from Russia.

DARDIK: Well, we were from Russia, from the same town. But of course he was with his mother because his father passed away before. And I was with my parents. I didn't even know him at that time. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: And then how did you meet up with him again? Do you remember meeting him?

DARDIK: Well, because we come from the same town.

LEVINE: Yeah. And so he came around. He came around.

DARDIK: Well, he came, we used to do a lot of things together because he was, he knew a little more, you know. He was not (?). So, and he was looking, because he knew how the family, so he used to come, for a long time. We didn't get married immediately.

LEVINE: Oh, he came a long time before you got married.

DARDIK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And then he too was a Hebrew teacher.

DARDIK: Yeah. And up till now he has the best, the best, you know, they think of him, he's the best that can be. From all the Hebrew teachers he is the best. They know it, in a lot of towns. And no, that was, he is, now he is not doing anything. That's goodbye.

LEVINE: Well, I'm afraid that we didn't get on tape that you had three girls and then three boys, so we want to mention that.

DARDIK: I don't know if you want to, can do that.

LEVINE: And we were saying what you were proudest of that you've done.

DARDIK: Well, I'm prouder than now because the, they are doing things that I would never even think of then, you

know. Each one, my daughters were teachers, also, in school, in English. But that should be, we tried, and they learned and they have good names, all of them, with the exception of me. I'm no good.

( she laughs )

LEVINE: I bet they don't think so. Well, let me ask you this. Do you think coming here at fifteen years old from Russia, do you think that made a big difference in your life?

DARDIK: Of course it made a big difference because there they live altogether different. So I didn't, I didn't go to school here, but I did, you know, I took, you know, you, how should I say that? I write and read and talk and whatever. Not going to school, because I had no time to go to school, but being with the children and their friends and all that, so I started being a little American. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: And how do you feel about being from Russia?

DARDIK: Well ( she sighs ), I had, we had more family, you know. Because my mother's side, and it was different. But how I feel from Russia? I forgot everybody. I forgot who and what the only ones that we had, let's say family remained there. So my mother was in touch with them, my father. But I didn't know them, because I was still a child. But later on I knew a little more. And right now I don't know who is there, what is there. The only thing I know that my, from our family there is hardly anybody, nobody is there any

more. That's all. If I would be, well, I wouldn't say older, but it's very hard to remember, because I just couldn't, I remember names, I remember at my age that the older ones, most of them are gone already. And that's it.

LEVINE: Was it your mother and father's idea that you become Americanized, or did they try to hold onto those ways of Russian ways?

DARDIK: Russian, what Russian ways. We came here, my father and mother, they couldn't say "do this, do that," because they didn't know themselves. But my, the other family, my sisters, and I had my brother, and after that I got a, myself, my other, my younger sister also. She's, she's here also someplace. So that's, you know, you have to try yourself, because if not, I didn't go to school because I had no way of going, and but I think . . .

LEVINE: You learned by yourself, just by daily living and learning.

DARDIK: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Is there anything, before we close, that you would like to say about starting out in a different country and coming here and building your life here?

DARDIK: Well, so that's what I did. I started, and even my mother and my father, you know, they did the same

thing. But, of course, they couldn't, they were too old for this. But my mother talks in English. See, she can't write or read. But otherwise we try the best, and that's all. And with me, of course, it's a little bit different, with me and my younger sister. My younger sister is here now, too.

LEVINE: Okay.

DARDIK: It's a long, long story to know, and to have, you know, to arrange so many things. It's a house and this and that. You have to go here and the other place. It's not, it wasn't easy, but I didn't mind it. We did whatever. My parents, for them it was a little hard, but they were in their company, see, with their people. And, oh, what you got for me?  
( referring to someone entering room )

VOICE OFF MIKE: Nothing today.

LEVINE: Okay, Sonja. I think we can close now, and I want to thank you very much.

DARDIK: Well, it wasn't easy. That's what I'm telling you. But there was no problem. We did whatever we could, and with the children. Whoever thought before, three doctors, three teachers, that's what they are, even now.

LEVINE: That's wonderful, and I think you should be proud.

DARDIK: Well, I am proud, but I'm not going around with my

nose up like, you know, somebody else. I know what I am, and I know my family and the people have respect for us, for my husband.

LEVINE: And for you.

DARDIK: And for me. ( she laughs ) I don't know. I'm not interested to go around and ask, "What do you think of me?" ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Okay. Well, Sonja, thank you very much, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been speaking with Sonja Dardik here at The Daughters of Miriam in Clifton, New Jersey on February 24, 1993, signing off.