

EI-263

CLAIRE GREENBERG OLIPHANT

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UKRAINE, 1923

AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "THE ADRIATIC"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: LIVERPOOL

RESIDENCES: UKRAINE: MEZHROVER

US: BROOKLYN, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today, it's March 17, 1993. I'm here with Claire Greenberg Oliphant, who came from Russia, the Ukraine, in 1923, when, let's see, when she was, how old were you?

OLIPHANT: Eleven years old.

LEVINE: Eleven, when she was eleven years old. And we are here in the Ellis Island studio. Well, I'm very happy to have a chance to talk with you, and that this has happened.

OLIPHANT: It's very exciting for me, too.

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LEVINE: Good.

OLIPHANT: To be here.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Okay. Well, why don't we start out at the beginning. Tell me your birth date.

OLIPHANT: My birth date is July 16, 1912.

LEVINE: And can you tell me the town that you were born in?

OLIPHANT: The town I was born in was called, it's a small town, Mezhrover, M-E-Z-H-R-O-V-E-R. Mezhrover is located, as we would say in this country, about fifty miles from Zhmerinker. Zhmerinker was a bigger town than Mezhrover. And Zhmerinker was known as having a big railroad station connected from parts of Russia to, the trains had to come into Zhmerinker to go to, from Odessa, or to go to Moscow.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was there a train station in Russia?

OLIPHANT: Not in my town. We didn't even have a doctor in my town.

LEVINE: Tell me more about your town.

OLIPHANT: My town was a small town where there was quite a

number of Jews, and there was quite a number of farmers that lived outside the town. And we had no doctors in the town. I only had one year of schooling by a rabbi.

LEVINE: Can you describe that, what it was like to go . . .

OLIPHANT: Well, from what I remember it was like a private tutor, and he taught me Hebrew.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of other children when you went, or were you, you were the only student when you were there?

OLIPHANT: No, there was a few children from the Jewish families. But we went through, in Russia, it was right after the first World War in America. There was a revolution in Russia, and we had suffered an awful lot.

LEVINE: Do you remember firsthand when the Revolution was going on?

OLIPHANT: I remember far back as a child as I could, that my mother was the sole supporter of the three children. My mother was raised on the farm, and these different soldiers that went through our town to go

to Zhmerinker. The Pollacks, the Cossacks, they burned places and destroyed, wherever they heard there was a Jew, we had to hide out. Some of the farmers that knew my mother and knew us, they would hide us out in, at night, but as soon as sundown came we had to leave because they were afraid of their lives, too. One time the Cossacks were coming. We had to leave our homes, and we traveled miles away, as you may see on television in this country, refugees. That I remember as a kid. I also remember some of the young people that went from Mezhydrover to Zhmerinker that was caught in the woods, and they were slaughtered. Those are the memories that I have, that, I say a prayer every day, and what I see on television today, if it wasn't for my father, we were lucky that he was a wonderful person, he did not desert us, and brought us to this country, I wouldn't be here and have the things that I have as if I was born in this country. I went to school here, I went, I worked in an office, and thank God that I can say I am an American. I vote on my father's papers. I wanted my own papers. They told me I don't need them because I am considered an American citizen because I came here as a minor. I needed a passport. I wanted

to go, my son wanted, used to go on conventions, school conventions, through his company, to Germany, and he wanted to take me, so I went to, I wanted to get my own passport. And unfortunately I mislaid my father's passport, that I was not able to get a passport because even though I went to school here, it's considered city. I voted, I was three times on jury duty, and that's considered state. And through living in Co-op City, and through Biaggi's office, I left a very nice impression on some of the secretaries that worked in the office, that they contacted the right people and they found the seal in Ellis Island, and I got a passport to go to Germany with my son.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wonderful. Well, let's talk a little bit more about when you were a little girl in Russia.

OLIPHANT: Yes.

LEVINE: You said that your mother was supporting you. What was your mother doing?

OLIPHANT: My mother, as I said, she was a farm girl. Sometimes she'd work in the fields. In the summertime, she would go to the different farmers and she would bring

in produce to sell. We also used to have a, like a marketplace that, once a week the farmers would bring down stuff for the Jewish people to buy. And we had, at that time, our own home, and I had an uncle that was what we call in this country like a two-family home, that one side of the building was ours, and one side was my father's brother's.

LEVINE: Could you describe the building? What was it made of? What did it look like?

OLIPHANT: Wood, and it was what we would call here like a motel that in the snowstorms people wanted to sleep over. We had a special room, and when they had the market days we used to sell tea. My mother had a big samovar, they called it, where people used to come in to warm up to have a glass of tea. That was, in the wintertime, that's how she, we made our living. They used to bake their own bread. In the summertime my mother used to work in the fields. During the Revolution when the bombs were being shot, my mother would be in the fields trying to cut the corn or grass, whatever it was. We used to hide out in cellars. At times we didn't have what to eat, that, from vegetables. I remember distinctly cucumbers,

radishes, onions. We would make a meal. We didn't know what it meant to have a piece of meat or chicken, milk. We didn't know what it was. Potatoes, we wouldn't.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

OLIPHANT: Pearl.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

OLIPHANT: Stein. And she, she was a beautiful woman, but she was raised on a farm the same like the farmers. And a lot of the farmers knew her, because she worked for them in the fields.

LEVINE: Now, she was raised on a farm. The farms were surrounding the little town.

OLIPHANT: Well, they were, on different towns, there's different cities. It's in the Ukraine. It was, there was, the farm places, Marcheva, called one town.

LEVINE: If you can spell any of these it would help.

OLIPHANT: M-A-R-C-H-E-V-A. In this country they formed organizations that, the names of the towns.

Today . . . Excuse me. To this day we still have an organization in this country by the name of Marcheva Society. We are dissolving now because all the people, my father was one of the organizers. The name of the organization is seventy-five years old, and because there isn't anybody to run it, we are dissolving this society.

LEVINE: Has this society been a part of your life since you came to this country?

OLIPHANT: Oh, yes. This society was a big part of my life. My father was the first organizer, one of the first organizers. There were seven people that organized the society, and also he was the first financial secretary.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, wow. Well, let's talk first more about Russia, and then we'll talk about life in this country.

OLIPHANT: Okay.

LEVINE: Your father's name?

OLIPHANT: My father's name was, his Jewish name was Heab. In English it's Julius, Julius Greenberg.

LEVINE: Now, did your father, did you know your father as a little girl in Russia?

OLIPHANT: No, I didn't know. He left, when he left Russia I was ten weeks old. He went to this country first with the understanding that he, to accumulate some money, and then send for my mother and the children. Well, the first World War broke out, and for years we didn't even know whether he was alive. Then one day my mother received a letter. My mother was not able to read or write, but she was a very bright woman, and all the years in this country my mother and father were together in the grocery business. My father couldn't exist without my mother.

LEVINE: Well, now, you had a brother and a sister?

OLIPHANT: I have a sister that just deceased.

LEVINE: Was she, and she came with you when . . .

OLIPHANT: She came together with me.

LEVINE: Now, what were the, in your family, when you were growing up, there was your mother, your sister . . .

OLIPHANT: My sister and my brother.

LEVINE: And what was your sister's name?

OLIPHANT: Her Jewish name was Hinda. In English she was Anna.

LEVINE: And your brother?

OLIPHANT: My brother's name was Itzek, I-T-Z-E-K. On the citizen papers his name is spelled Ike, I-K-E. And in English his name, he is called Isadore.

LEVINE: Were you particularly close to any one family member when you were . . .

OLIPHANT: We were a very close-knitted family. There was no difference whether my brother was retarded or my mother brought us up, each individual, the same way.

LEVINE: Did you have an extended family?

OLIPHANT: What do you mean by extended?

LEVINE: Nearby, in other words, aunts and uncles, grandparents?

OLIPHANT: No, I didn't have no grandparents. I was named after my mother's mother, my grandmother. But we did have families that were, the Greenberg family, a son of my uncle, that was in this country, a daughter was here

that married in this country, and she had children. And all the people that lived, that immigrated from Mezherov, some of them came to this country through Roumania. They came through Poland. And my father used to write letters, and my mother will not leave Russia, because she was in this country, and she worked in the factory, and it was a hard living. That's one of the reasons they left this country the first time.

LEVINE: Your mother was here?

OLIPHANT: My mother was here the first time, and they went back to Russia.

LEVINE: This was before you were born?

OLIPHANT: Before I was born. My father was a while in Russia. Then she was pregnant with my sister, and then I was born. And after I was born my father left Russia. He didn't like it. And he went back to, they lived, at that time, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

LEVINE: What do you remember your mother telling you about America when you were a little girl?

OLIPHANT: Well, we had so much hardship and grief that we

really didn't talk about, much about those things. I didn't even know if I had a father, or where, because we had no communication, we couldn't have any mail in Russia. It had to go, the mail had to go to Zhmerinker, address, that whoever lived in Zhmerinker, to bring the mail to Mezhrover. But when we finally heard from my father, then he started to send us packages from this country to Russia, food, whatever could be sent by post, and he worked on it to become an American citizen to, that we should come to this country through the American consul on a free passport, and that's how we left Russia.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember any happy times, or do you have any fond memories?

OLIPHANT: I couldn't say. I didn't have a childhood, not until I came to this country. I didn't have a pair of shoes. I had to walk barefooted. And when my sister's shoes got tight, I had to wear them. In the summertime we used to go barefooted, which wasn't, there was no such thing. We were glad if we had food to put in our stomachs.

LEVINE: So at some point your father, what, sent you money?

How did you, how did it happen . . .

OLIPHANT: He did not send money. He sent packages, food, like condensed milk, rice, food that you can, beans, that you can cook. That's the kind of packages we used to get. Because money, he couldn't, he was working in a factory, saving his money, trying to bring his family here.

LEVINE: How did the Jewish people and the Gentiles get along in your small town?

OLIPHANT: Very well. The Jewish people had their synagogues. We observed all religions, and we used to be very friendly with the surrounding farmers, the Gentile people. And there was no such thing as hatred or anything. We got along very well. We did not, we had to escape the killings, and the rapings, when the soldiers came into the town, especially like my mother's house was considered like a motel. The first thing they were looking, we used to lock up the doors, for young people, women, for rapings, children killing. And in the small towns following our town there was a lot of burning of the farms, a lot of killings, the same thing that you hear here in other

countries what's going on. That I kiss the ground that I'm not in Russia. Had it not been for my father, and what I see pictures of, I could be among them.

LEVINE: Well, the Gentile people were mostly farmers, and what were the Jewish people doing to make a living there?

OLIPHANT: Well, some of them had stores such as dry goods stores. They used to have, sew by hand or so. Like my mother, she would go to the nearby farms and she'd hire a horse and wagon, and she'd bring in plums, fruit, in the summertime. They used to make their own things. In the summer we used to prepare for the winter, like in the olden days we didn't even have heat. We had to make our own heat. My mother would bake her own bread, that wherever you warmed up in the wintertime with a wooden stove. I used to wear boots with rags wrapped around my feet to keep the cold out. We used to go out on a Saturday we worked, we observed the Sabbath, to look for somebody to put the light on to warm up the wood, to make a light, for the wood to burn. And we would try to, in the summertime, to go fishing. We would eat fish, but

mostly things that grew and what we prepared in the summertime for the winter.

LEVINE: And did you have, like, running water in your house?

OLIPHANT: No.

LEVINE: How did . . .

OLIPHANT: We had to bring in the water from the river. I carried it on my shoulders when I was getting a little older, in buckets. That's how we brang our water, to the kitchen.

LEVINE: And how about the washing?

OLIPHANT: At the river, just like you would see in the movies. That's the way the people in the south would wash their clothes years ago, at the river, that's how we lived.

LEVINE: And what kind of a stove did your mother have for cooking?

OLIPHANT: It was, I wouldn't, I don't remember the stove, but I remember that it was like an oven, and that oven, where she made the fire, warmed the house where we used to gather around to warm our, near the walls.

We warmed up the walls.

LEVINE: So at some point your father sent you either money or tickets?

OLIPHANT: Not money. Oh, you mean to . . .

LEVINE: To come to this country.

OLIPHANT: To come here, to come to this country he sent us money for tickets that we, when we left Mezherover, we went to Zhmerinker, and we stayed with my uncle's son for about a week. We had to wait for a second train. We traveled two days on the train, we passed Kiev, to reach Moscow. When we reached Moscow we went to the American consul. They put us up in a hotel that was like a flophouse. We slept on the floor. And my father was, had sent money to the American consul that we would go to shop to buy some fish or vegetables, and we would cook there. And . . .

LEVINE: In the place where you were staying?

OLIPHANT: There where we were staying. In Moscow they had two, I remember two railroad stations, that we were staying was near a small railroad station. Not the one that we came from Zhmerinker. We, our

nourishment was at the station that had warm water, so we used to drink tea and bread. That was our nourishment.

LEVINE: Did you take things with you? Did you bring things?

OLIPHANT: The only thing that my mother cherished is the pillows that she, they had what you would call here down pillows, from the white goose, that we brought, the pillows, and the clothes on our backs. That's the only thing that we were able to take, because we didn't have valuable things or anything.

LEVINE: So when you were staying at the American consul, did you . . .

OLIPHANT: The American consul helped us . . .

LEVINE: To find . . .

OLIPHANT: They put us up in the hotel.

LEVINE: I see.

OLIPHANT: We had to go to the Russian Square, what they call today, but it was the American consul, and gave us a certain amount of money to feed the family.

LEVINE: And what was it like for you, that was your first time in a big city.

OLIPHANT: Well, it was exciting.

LEVINE: Do you remember what struck you as . . .

OLIPHANT: Well, the railroad was exciting. I remember the nice buildings. I was at the Red Square where I believe Lenin was buried. That I remember. And then from there we went on a train, finally, to Riga, and from Riga we went to Libau by a boat that we reached. We had reached a town, I don't remember. It was a railroad that we went to, like the English channel, to London. We were on a boat when we landed in London. And from London we were, see, I'm a little confused now. From London we landed a, took a train to Liverpool. And in Liverpool we had to stay also in a hotel until all papers cleared that we were able to, because we had to take a small boat, and then we had to, we couldn't get on the ship immediately. We went on the ship. That's when we went to this country. We were three weeks on the ship.

LEVINE: How long was it from the time you left Mezhydrover till you got on the ship in Liverpool?

OLIPHANT: Well, it must have been about six weeks that we (?),
if not more.

LEVINE: And did you have to go through any kind of
examinations by the steamship company prior to
leaving?

OLIPHANT: We went through every place that we came starting
from Riga. We had, the first thing they'd give us
showers, and examinations. And then when we were on
the ship we were examined for all kinds of diseases.
I used to have long hair with braids. My mother
used to pride herself that she, my sister and I had
long hair. We had beautiful, my sister was, she
looked like my father. She had beautiful black hair,
and I had light brown hair like my mother. I looked
like my mother. And she made sure that our heads
were clean. She used to wash our hair with kerosene.
In Russia she used to wash our hair with kerosene,
that we shouldn't have any lice and stuff. And we
went through every examination on the boat before we
came to this country.

LEVINE: Okay. So the boat that you sailed on.

OLIPHANT: Yes?

LEVINE: The name of it?

OLIPHANT: Is the Adriatic.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And that left Liverpool. And do you remember any experiences on the ship itself?

OLIPHANT: Well, the ship was beautiful. We had plenty of food. Of course, I was too young to understand it, but we weren't hungry. We were always eating, and there was a lot of joy on the boat, young people. And I'll never forget the experience that when we spotted land, first we got very sick. My mother was very seasick, and all of us got seasick. But after we felt better and we came out on deck, it was always, it was separated from first class to third class. My brother had to sleep with my men, but we were in a cabin, my mother and the two children. And there was always dancing and singing on the boat.

LEVINE: Were there . . .

OLIPHANT: And very happy.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of different ethnic people . . .

OLIPHANT: A lot of young people, not only from Russia, but maybe from various places that I wouldn't even understand. When I came to this country I spoke Russian. Today I don't. I can catch a word here and there, but I don't understand, because I wasn't interested.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. I think we'll pause here. We need to turn the tape over, and we'll resume in a minute.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now on Side B of the tape. Now, we were talking about, you were on the ship, and you were not in steerage, I take it. You were in a third class cabin.

OLIPHANT: Right.

LEVINE: You and your mother and your sister.

OLIPHANT: Right.

LEVINE: And your brother was with the men.

OLIPHANT: It was the men. It was against the law for . . .

LEVINE: Now, who looked after your brother?

OLIPHANT: Pardon?

LEVINE: Who looked after your brother?

OLIPHANT: He was able to look after, we saw him during the day, just that he slept where the men were. And we would eat together on the boat.

LEVINE: It sounds like it was a very happy trip.

OLIPHANT: Oh, yes. It was beautiful, just beautiful. You looked down, and you saw sky and water. Once in a while you'd see another boat passing.

LEVINE: And do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

OLIPHANT: Well, I remember coming in. We were detained on account of my brother. The first class people got off first. Then we were transferred to another boat, and things had to be straightened out, the papers, until finally they brought us on a small boat to Ellis Island and we were here maybe a day or so.

LEVINE: Okay. Could you describe your impression of Ellis Island?

OLIPHANT: Well, it was, I got lost here. I got separated from the dining room, that they had to bring me over where they gave you the I.Q. Then when my father came we were like, just like you would see animals are graded in, and he, they came to claim the family, and then that's the time my mother introduced us, pointed out my father, "This is your father."

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt?

OLIPHANT: How I felt? For about four months I wouldn't, I refused to call him "dad." I was very much against, because I didn't know what it means to have a father, and I was never among men to know, I remember my grandfather, his father. Then I was a little girl. In fact, I have a mark on my foot when I fell over an ax that the grandfather took care of me, but my father, I didn't know. We never mentioned Father because my mother didn't know whether he was alive or he was dead. But eventually I came around.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about the, what had to be sorted out about your brother. What, can you tell me about that?

OLIPHANT: Well, I wouldn't know about that. I wouldn't

remember. Because he was born, years ago, you know, they had, kept different records, and he was detained, that they had to prove certain certificates or what, because otherwise they wouldn't admit him to this country. He was born in this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

OLIPHANT: He was born in Philadelphia. They lived in Philadelphia in those, the first time they came here, because on my mother's side she had family in Philadelphia. Then they moved to New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, you said before, your brother was retarded?

OLIPHANT: He was slightly retarded.

LEVINE: Slightly. So did he, because he was born here . . .

OLIPHANT: They let him in.

LEVINE: They let him in. Uh-huh. I see.

OLIPHANT: Yes. He's an American citizen.

LEVINE: I see.

OLIPHANT: He is mentioned on my father's papers also. They had

the seal here in this country, in Ellis Island, because from Biaggi's office, she called somebody and gave the name, and it didn't, I happened to be in her office because I was very anxious to get a passport to be able to travel. It's five years ago that this happened, because my passport is good for ten years.

I still have my passport. So according to the description I gave and the date, he located the seal immediately and he sent it to me, and the woman that took all the information, I made a great impression on her, and she told me, when I receive it, it was coming to my house, I should come back and show it to her, and she contacted somebody that I should see, to go down to the immigration office on Fifth Avenue, I believe it's 50th Street, and the lines are immense, they just saved me the hardship, that I went, she gave me a pass, that I went direct to see that party.

She, immediately when I came there she, I showed her the pass. She knew about it. She sent to have a picture taken, and I came back to her place, and she, I paid them a check, I think forty-two dollars, and she sent me up to another floor to get the passport.

I had to wait around there, and they told me to come back after lunch, which I did, the same day, and

finally I got my passport.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about your first few hours, or the first few days, even, in this country?

OLIPHANT: Well, it was, when I came to this country we were living with my father's niece.

LEVINE: And where was that?

OLIPHANT: In Williamsburg, Brooklyn. From the boat we went to Brooklyn, and my parents, we only stayed with them about a week because they had their mind made up that eventually they're going. My father worked in a grocery store, that they're going to go into business and try to make a living. So we rented an apartment on Havermeyer Street in Williamsburg. We only lived there about a month. Then we moved to the Bronx. My father bought a store, a grocery store.

LEVINE: Do you remember where the store was?

OLIPHANT: Yes, 156th Street and Prospect Avenue in the Bronx. He had somebody working as a helper in the store, and my father had some experience from, he was partners with, my mother's brother had a brother here, too, and things didn't work out the way it should. But my

mother had a very good head on her shoulders, and she was in the store, and we lived there. They had the store about four or five years, and I was registered at school. I went to P.S. 52.

LEVINE: And do you remember what school was like?

OLIPHANT: Well, it was exciting. I was bright, even if I have to say myself, but I had to be taught how to speak English, and I was very good. (she coughs) Excuse me. I was very good in arithmetic, and I had a good memory that, in the C class they taught us how to try to speak English, to pick up the English words.

LEVINE: Was the C class mainly to learn to speak English?

OLIPHANT: To speak English, and for minors, to teach them arithmetic, addition, multiplication, divisions, reading.

LEVINE: So the children in that class had all come from Europe?

OLIPHANT: It was all foreigners. At that time they had a class, and then after a year they grade you. When I started I was over age, but they put me in 5-A, and in the summertime I went to summer school to make up

classes.

LEVINE: And did you like school?

OLIPHANT: Very much, very much.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences learning English when you really began to understand and . . .

OLIPHANT: Well, it's like starting the ABC's. That's how it was. Of course, I felt overage, that they were small children in my class and I was older. It felt like an inferior, but I knew because I, there were some girls that were customers in my father's store that were trying to teach me how to speak English, and how to, and all my friends were American friends. I wouldn't mingle with foreigners. And in the house, well, I'd speak Jewish to my mother and father, but also my marriage we spoke English. My husband also came from Poland, and he came as a child.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, were you treated, do you remember feeling like a greenhorn?

OLIPHANT: That's right. (she laughs) They used to call us the greenhorns. And we walked with the baskets to the house, they saw, "Oh, here are the greenhorns."

LEVINE: Why, because you had baskets?

OLIPHANT: No. Well, instead of valises, we had European baskets, so it was a sign that you come from the other side, here are the greenhorns. And Havermeyer Street was a marketplace. It's like downtown, Orchard Street, if you're acquainted, in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you went to school, and then you were put in the fifth grade. And did you go through grammar school?

OLIPHANT: I went through grammar school up to 7-B. Then I dropped out, and I went at night school, P.S. 39.

LEVINE: Why did you drop out?

OLIPHANT: Because I had a complex. I wanted to work in the store with my parents, and I went to summer school, like I said, twice. And I was put back, I was from 8-A put back to 7-B because I didn't like Greek history, and it became boring to me. So I was in the store, and I went at night. I finished, I got my permit, my diploma. Then I went to Morris High School in the evening, and I decided, my parents decided that I should go to a private school, Rhodes

Preparatory School, and I learned typing and bookkeeping. I was very good in figures. And I worked in an office as a bookkeeper.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

OLIPHANT: (she laughs) I met my husband though, he was a musician.

LEVINE: What did he play?

OLIPHANT: He was a professional musician. He played the trumpet and the violin, and he was, he was very talented. He was also a choir leader and a cantor. But I met him, in those days there were dances. I had a girlfriend, it just happened in the wintertime, I had a girlfriend who lived in Brighton Beach, and I lived in the Bronx, so we used to meet halfway, and she knew some fellows where they were running dances, Sunday night, and I happened to come up, instead of going to the movies, it was a very cold night, we went to the dance, and we'd stay a while, and then we would each go our way. So it happened that Sunday night my husband wasn't playing, and he was standing at the machine that the kids play. And when I came in I had rosy cheeks, and he mentioned to one of the

friends, and it's a fellow that my girlfriend knew, he says, "You know, I would like to meet this girl."

And he introduced us, and that's how we became friends. He had a car. He used to come up to the Bronx. And I had various jobs. I worked in a one-girl office as a bookkeeper, too, answering the phone. I didn't care for typing because I was stumped by the language. I took steno also, but had a problem with the language, but bookkeeping is what I liked. So I worked in small places in the office. Then I worked also saleslady in boutique stores, and I've been around.

LEVINE: Well, now, what was your husband's name?

OLIPHANT: Morris.

LEVINE: And did you work up until the time you were married?
Did you work after you were married as well?

OLIPHANT: I've been working practically all my life. Even though I didn't have to work. I took a leave of absence when I had, just going to private school, before Christmas, and I would say that my mother was sick and I had to be home, and I was working in the store during the Christmas rush. I enjoyed working.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

OLIPHANT: I had two children. I lost a daughter, I lost a daughter, eight years old, from leukemia. And this is my son.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

OLIPHANT: My daughter's name was Esther. She was named after my husband's mother, and she was eight years old when she passed away. She had leukemia.

LEVINE: And your son?

OLIPHANT: And David, David Oliphant. He's my son.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren at this point?

OLIPHANT: Oh, yes. I have three beautiful grandchildren. I have two married, and I'm a great-grandmother. My, and I'm expecting two new babies. I have a granddaughter, her name is Laura, she's got a two-year-old little boy, she's pregnant, she's going to give birth in June. And I have my older grandson, Jeffrey. He's a college graduate. And he's married, going to be two years, his wife is expecting a baby next month. And I have a twenty-four-year-old

grandson, Perry. He's a very, very nice boy. And my son at one time was a professional baseball player also, and he, Perry had his heart set to be a professional ball player but, unfortunately, his arm is, he had trouble with his arm. So today, as soon as things get better, he is looking for something in sporting goods. But he's working, he's a good boy. They're good children. I'm very close with the family. We have a very good relationship.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Looking back on your life, starting out as you did in difficult circumstances and coming to this country, how do you think being an immigrant and coming and starting, essentially, a new life, how do you think it's affected you as a person?

OLIPHANT: As a person, I don't consider myself an immigrant. I consider myself like I'm born in this country as a very lucky person, because as, speaking to you I may still have a slight accent, but I can read well, I worked in offices, and I can travel, and I made up for a lot of things that I lost as a child. And right now I'm living, my husband is deceased, and I live alone right now. He's deceased eight years. I kept up my standard of living just the same. And, to

be honest, I like my home. I mingle with people, I'm well-liked, I respect people, and I am secretary, financial secretary of the Mezhrover Society. We are dissolving it now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what would you say you're either most thankful for or most proud of?

OLIPHANT: To be an American citizen. I consider myself as one of the luckiest, and I owe most of my thanks to the wonderful father I had, because there's a lot of men that left their wives in Europe, never brought them back to this country, and I had wonderful parents. I didn't realize it when I was younger as I realize it more and more, seeing how men deserted their wives and loved, it was between my parents. He was a good man and a wonderful father.

LEVINE: Did you or your parents keep up with any of the customs from the old country once you became American?

OLIPHANT: Well, they had their customs. They believed in Judaism, even though my father, until the age of seventy-five, was in the grocery business, and my mother was a very sick woman. She went through a

lot. He kept, Saturday the stores were open because it was his livelihood. But in the house my mother kept a Kosher home and observed all the Jewish laws.

I'm a little bit different, but I still cling, at heart, I'm a Jew.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to say before we close?

OLIPHANT: No. It's a wonderful country, and I count my blessings every day, and I sure didn't expect that I'm going to be interviewed on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well . . .

OLIPHANT: It's something that will be a nice memory.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

OLIPHANT: Maybe someday I'll write a book. I'll put it in my book.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Okay. Well, it's been a pleasure talking with you, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here with Claire Greenberg Oliphant on March 17, 1993, and I'm signing off. Thank you very much.

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OLIPHANT: It was nice talking to you.