

EI-332

IRENE GOLDBERG RODMAN

BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 31, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 29, 1993

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 85

RUNNING TIME: 49:10

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW YORK, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CAROLYN LEE; IRV SILBERG

UKRAINE VIA ROMANIA, 1921

AGE: 13

SHIP: NOT GIVEN

PORT: ANTWERP

RESIDENCES:

- **UKRAINE: WINKOWITZ**
- **US: DETROIT, MICHIGAN**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Manhattan with Irene Goldberg Rodman, who was born on October 31, 1907. She was thirteen years old when she came from Russia via Romania in either 1921 or 1922. Today is May 29, 1993, and I just want to say that this happened serendipitously because Mrs. Rodman was visiting her daughter, who lives in the same apartment complex as I, and so she is here from Michigan, and we're conducting the interview here. Well, I'm very happy to get to talk with you.

RODMAN: Nice to talk with you too, thank you.

LEVINE: Good. Okay. Let's start by your saying, your birth date was October, well, let's say where you were born first.

RODMAN: I was born in a little town in Russia called Winkowitz. I truly don't believe it's any more on the map. We did have some relatives there, but during the revolutionary periods and from the time we arrived in America, within a few years we lost contact. So I don't, I doubt very much if that city is there.

LEVINE: Could you take a stab at spelling it?

RODMAN: I would say Winkowitz, W-I-N-K-O-W-I-T-Z, and it was in the Ukraine area of Russia.

LEVINE: And tell me how you came to get the birth date that you used?

RODMAN: (she laughs). I am named after a biblical name in the Jewish bible called Chayasora. And when, when I was born in Russia I guess in those days, particularly with the Jewish families, there were no birth certificates. If there was any, they probably got destroyed anyway. When I arrived in the United States and I had to register to go to school, that Saturday they read, in the synagogue, they read the portion about this woman, Chayasora, and it happened to be on October the 31st. That's how I chose that date as my birthday. And 1907 was merely because what my mother figured according to my age. So I'm always questioning whether that was really my authentic birthday or not. But that's how I have registered in the schools, and that's how I've lived all through my life.

LEVINE: Is Chayasora with a, is it a C-H?

RODMAN: C-H. C-H-A, Chaya. C-H-A-Y-A, I believe.

LEVINE: And

Rodman: Chayasora is Sarah, you know.

LEVINE: Sarah. I see.

RODMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, how did you come, then, to be Irene?

RODMAN: Okay. (they laugh). That's another very nice question. My Jewish name, (she clears her throat) the Jewish name was called Hiken, and all, amazingly enough it seemed that all the immigrants arriving in that year, I have a cousin of mine in New York, her name was Chaika. They all became Ida. They took the American name as Ida. And so I took that name, too. I don't know what possessed me to change it to Irene, or I should say I do know, 'cause when I got into high school and I also had a very dear friend of mine, she was of Romanian birth, and her name was Yvette, and she said, "Ida is not such a nice name. Why don't you change it to Irene?" (they laugh). So I was influenced by her to become Irene.

LEVINE: Well, how old were you at that point?

RODMAN: I would say I was around fourteen then, fourteen, fifteen. And since then I have learned that Irene is a very, very nice name. It means peace. And by nature, I would like to think that I'm a very, very peaceful person. So I guess something happened that I took that name, and I do feel that it fits me, if it means peaceful, by all means. I'm very pleased with the name.

LEVINE: Okay. So tell me now about the village where you were born.

RODMAN: It was a little town. It was really not a village. It was a little town where

mostly occupied by Jewish people. The villages were the surrounding areas where the Christian people lived, the farmers lived, in the little villages. We lived in a little town that was a Jewish little town. It was all Jews.

LEVINE: Now, what did the Jews do, what did they do for work, mostly?

RODMAN: Well, mostly they were merchants, you know. As a matter of fact, I even remember my grandfather from my father's side. He dealt with the orchards. He dealt with the buying orchards, going into the villages. And I remember when he used to come and visit us, we children were taught a lot of reverence for our grandparents in particular, and I remember my grandfather, we as children used to round to greet him and grab his hand and kiss him, and he had a long beard. This stays with me the rest of my life. And we would greet him, and I knew that that's what he was doing. He was dealing that way. And I think it carried over later on to my father, who also liked farming. And, you know, to this day we have an inheritance that my father bought some farmland near Monroe, Michigan, and so far we haven't been able to sell it, (laughs) but it's there, so there's the farm blood in my father, and I remember my father's father, you know, that it was, those are memories that I have from the past, too.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now, what was the relationship between the Jewish people living in the town and the non-Jewish people in the surrounding area?

RODMAN: I'll tell you something, I wish that relationship could exist nowadays in our communities where there is so much racism going on and so much bigotry. I don't remember that. I do remember that the relationship was very good. The farmers used to bring in their wares, their produce, to sell. And the Jewish people, they had like a market, and they would go and buy, and it was a very good relationship. We don't remember, I don't

remember anti, any anti-Semitism. Maybe if they didn't like the Jewish people, but they didn't, they weren't vocal about it at any rate, you know. What we experienced later on was the fears when the Revolution broke out in Russia, where the Bolsheviks were fighting another army, the what they called them, the Pecluras at the time, the other army was a rich army, and the Bolsheviks was the poor armies. I hate to use that word, but they used to be first referred to them as the lousy ones because they were so poor, you know. And that's when they came into the areas and fighting.

LEVINE: And, so what do you remember of seeing this, or being in, in the area?

RODMAN: Let me tell you what I remember very vividly that stays with me. Now, I started to say I was born in the city Winkowitz, but later on we moved because there was no way, we didn't have any livelihood, because my father had gone to America, and he left my mother with four children. My youngest sister at the time when he left for America was four weeks old, and I had a brother two years older than myself and another sister. My, in those days, the men used to go to America to make money and then come back, not to stay in America. My father went to America to make some money and come back, because he also dealt with farms and with orchards, and he always had to borrow money. And even in those days the interest, what they had to pay by borrowing, ate him up alive, so they couldn't do it. So he went to America to make money. Now.

LEVINE: When did he go?

RODMAN: Well, I mean, whether he was gone for eight years during the Revolution, we didn't hear from them, so that was eight years before 1921. And when he arrived in America, the first thing he did, he started to work in the steam laundry in New York, and he sent my mother right away some money so she should start saving it. Then, when the Russian Revolution broke out,

there was no communication for eight years. And so my mother was left with four children, my brother and myself and my two sisters, the one was just born. She had a brother living in another city called Minkowitz. It was a little bit of a bigger city, and he was a successful businessman. So he took us out there to be near him. And they had tobacco fields there that you could work. So that's how we were there, like. And my mother's sister lived in a village. You see, you talk about villages, villages were all Gentile people. But my mother's sister, with seven children and her husband, had also left for America. They lived in the village, so that we moved into that village next to the city of Minkowitz. And in that village they had tobacco fields, and so we were working on the tobacco fields. I was just telling my little granddaughter the other day how I was earning money by going into the fields and picking the leaves, and I described them to her, the size of the leaves from the tobacco, and then you string 'em on strings and you hang 'em up to dry, and that's how tobacco is made.

LEVINE: So you were working in the fields, and your brother?

RODMAN: My brother was two years old, and my other sister who's about a year and three months younger than I am, we worked picking tobacco leaves.

LEVINE: And how did your mother and your aunt, how did they manage to . . .

RODMAN: Well, they, they managed, they manage, that's why, they also worked.

LEVINE: They, in the fields as well?

RODMAN: In the fields, that's right. My aunt, though, see, my aunt with her seven children, she lived in the village way, way before we came there, and her two oldest daughters, two, I should say three, were dressmakers. And

they did some sewing, so they made a living that way. And my aunt worked in the house in cooking, just to take care of a family like that alone, you know.

LEVINE: So what, so you were working in the fields from what age, roughly?

RODMAN: I would say from the age of nine years, eight, eight, nine years.

LEVINE: Did you go to school at all?

RODMAN: No, no. We had some tutoring at home. I never went to a Russian school. I only learned the Russian language by way of association. But I did, we had a private, what we call like a rabbi, a tutor, coming into the house.

LEVINE: And what did he teach you?

RODMAN: So he taught me how to read Jewish and how to write Jewish. To this day, I know how to read Jewish. It stayed with me, you know. Amazingly enough, it's something I never used. I could read Hebrew because it's so similar to the Yiddish. However, I don't understand what I'm reading, and that's to my dissatisfaction, you know. I wish I did know.

LEVINE: Well, now, what were you speaking in the home?

RODMAN: Jewish.

LEVINE: You were, and you learned Russian just by being around?

RODMAN: Just by being around. My mother spoke very good Russian, you know, more of the Ukraine style, because they dealt with the Russian people,

you know, they had to. But I just spoke Yiddish. That's the only language.

I remember very vividly when we were in the village and the two armies, the Peclura Army and the Bolshevik Army, were fighting. And one day the Peclura Army came into the village where my auntie lived, my aunt and her children, and we lived there, too. And they rounded up, they knew that there was some Jewish people living there, and they decided they wanted to kill all the Jews. So they rounded us up in one apartment. And myself and my little sister, the one that's six years younger than I am, were outside, and they told us to watch the horse while they went inside. I don't know what they were doing inside, and, but in the meantime, they, it goes to show you, you asked me before what the association was between the Jewish people and the farmers or the villagers. I want to tell you it was a very good association, because when the farmers found out that this very mean army was rounding up the Jewish people in one area, they came with pitchforks, and they attacked when the two soldiers, they attacked them. So, in reprisal of the attacks, and the others ran out on the fields where the army were, they came back and they set the whole village on fire. Now, everybody escaped with the exception of myself and my little sister, because we were hiding. By that time we were hiding in one of the, oh, I don't know, maybe it was the sweet corn field or something, 'cause we knew that something bad is going on. And all the others ran out from the house, and they ran to the highway, and they ran to another village. By the time, in the meantime we, my sister and I, we were left in this village, and the whole village was left, they turned, burned the whole village with the exception of one house they didn't touch, for some reason maybe they had to run away already. And the following days, my mother was so sure that my sister and I were definitely destroyed by the fires, she pleaded with somebody, by the Jewish tradition it's very, very important that the bones are buried at least and the souls are saved, you know, to bury them, she pleaded with somebody to go to the village and bring her back at least the bones from her two children. There was a Jewish woman that

was brave enough to disguise herself as a peasant. She dressed as a peasant, and she came into this village, and there was myself and my sister, and we were rescued by the villagers. They took care of us, you know. I remember staying with them and overnight the bullets flying over the, like over the roofs. They had the straw roofs, you know, and this was the house that was saved, and they had like an overhang, and we were hiding over it, and the bullets were flying overnight, because these two armies were fighting, you know, on the road. Anyway, this woman that came, she took us back to the village where my aunt and the children and my mother with the other two children, were there.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought before you got rescued?

RODMAN: I really can't tell you that I remember anything. I do remember it happening, but I don't know what my reaction was at the time. My youngest sister, the one that's six years younger than I am, she seems to have more vivid recollections, even from the time when we had to steal the border to get out of Russia. We stole the border to get into, from the Ukraine into Romania. You weren't allowed to leave. So they had these people that you paid them, you know. I forgot their name, what they called them, smugglers, or something to that effect. During the night, they smuggled them across. And it was called the Dniester, it was like a frozen river. And my sister remembers that she was, the man that was taking us across the river, frozen river, you know, you had to pray. She kept praying in Russian. She kept saying, "bozha moi.". That's a Russian word, "Dear God, dear God, dear God." She remembers doing that, see. I don't remember.

LEVINE: This was a Jewish woman, but she was praying in Russian?

RODMAN: My sister.

LEVINE: Oh, your sister.

RODMAN: My sister, yeah. So she remembers that, I don't, but that's how we got across into Romania.

LEVINE: Well, now, how long after the village was burned did you actually leave the . . .

RODMAN: That, oh, that, oh that was years, that was quite a few years later after the Revolution stopped, see, when the Russia opened up again. Then we began to communicate with, with the father, you know. And then they sent for us to come to America.

LEVINE: I see. Well, there's so many things I want to cover, in a short time.
(laughs).

RODMAN: I know, I know. All right, dear. Don't let me get away with something, so you go right on.

LEVINE: No, I, the important things.

RODMAN: Go right on.

LEVINE: Just give me a description of your house. Like, how did you live? What were the living conditions?

RODMAN: Oh, way back in the house that I was born? Okay. The house was like stucco, you know, not brick. And we lived, like, up on a little hill, and down, down the hill was a public bathhouse. Imagine those days, we did

have a bath house, because, you know, according to the Jewish tradition, I don't know if you know or aware of it, the woman has to go, after her period she has to go to the bathhouse to cleanse herself to become pure again. And I remember my mother used to take me to the bath house and I didn't like it because they had very steam, which they use now in the sauna baths here, they use the steam, and it would make me feel nauseous. To this day I don't like steam, you know. (She laughs) Maybe that was the reason. But, at any rate, that was the house that we lived in, and there was only one or two bedrooms in a big kitchen. And the floor was made, on Friday we would put, go outside and get like clay to put on the floor that to get it ready for the Shabbat, you know. And I do remember that, living in the house, there was a big oven, and then you have, where you could lay down near the oven to keep warm, you know. And the oven, of course, for the Sabbath, it goes all night long. So that was the heat that we had from that area in the house.

LEVINE: Was it a, it was an oven? It was a like a, an iron ?

RODMAN: I don't recall. I don't think it was iron. I think it was like heavy mortar of some kind, you know. You paint over it. So that's how I remember. That's my birth house, really. I remember that.

LEVINE: Was this one big room, or were there lots of rooms?

RODMAN: No, there weren't lots of rooms. I think there was only maybe one side room where nowadays we call it bedrooms, you know. And then one room where this oven is, with like a big table, a kitchen, for cooking and all that. That's why I seem to have a very vivid memory of that, you know.

LEVINE: And what other religious, what other ways were you observant?

RODMAN: Just in Yiddish, just in Yiddish, knowing the Jewish holidays, you know. We weren't strictly orthodox. I do know that. My father, especially, was not. I found that out when I came to the United States. But my mother kept a kosher home, you know. She was not fanatically religious. I hate to use the word "fanatic." Maybe I shouldn't. But that's how I feel about the strict, strict religion, you know.

LEVINE: So what, what did you do for enjoyment? What, what was . . . ?

RODMAN: Oh. (she laughs) As a child, growing up as a child, I tell you, I am amazed now when I see all the toys that the children have. Because when I was growing up as a child, there were no toys like that. My mother used to make us dolls out of a little towel and stuff it inside with old clothing or whatever, cotton or something, and that was a doll for us. And I don't know, I seem to remember a happy childhood. You know, I don't, there was no problem. Singing, a little music. We didn't have good record players like you have here. As a matter of fact, I seem to remember, I think there was only one record player in the city, and people would round to hear it played, you know. But mostly singing. My mother used to sing a lot.

LEVINE: Really.

RODMAN: She sang a lot.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, let's see. Maybe, I guess, to give your father's name and your mother's name and her maiden name.

RODMAN: My mother's maiden name was Lerma. And, actually, the way we came to have the name Goldberg, let me tell you this. My father's name was Darman, Darman, D-A-R-M-A-N. But what had happened originally, when

he decided to come to America, in those days they also had some immigration rules, but they allowed farmers to come in. And he came under the rule of being a farmer, but he had very, very puffy white hands. And they looked at his hands, they said, "You're not a farmer," so they sent him back. He couldn't come into the states. When he, but he was determined to come in, and he knew, they said that if you have a relative, you have a blood relative, you can come. My mother had a cousin here by the name of Goldberg, Jake Goldberg. So my father took the name Goldberg, re-entered the United States under that name. That's how we began with the name Goldberg originally, see.

LEVINE: Wow. So then did your mother's cousin, did he have to come and meet your father and sign for him?

RODMAN: I guess, I guess he had to. And my father worked in New York. When he came to the States, he worked in New York in a steam laundry, because my mother's cousin happened to be in the laundry, so that's how he worked there. And then my mother's cousin moved to Detroit, and my father ended up being in Detroit, Michigan.

LEVINE: I see. So your father was here in the United States working in the steam laundry.

RODMAN: In New York.

LEVINE: While you were still . . .

RODMAN: In Russia.

LEVINE: In Russia.

RODMAN: And we didn't even hear from each other because of the Revolution. Eight years, cut off eight years. As a matter of fact, when my father left for America, he left my mother with four children. A son . . .

LEVINE: What were their names?

RODMAN: Isrul, Israel, and my name was Chaika, and then there was Manya, and there was Gittel, Gittela. You know, they always made, Gittela was the one that he left four weeks old. Imagine the brave, the courage of these people. Because, as I said before, the intention was to come back home, but they were stranded for eight years. So that was the family that he left behind. In the meantime, during the course of these eight years, it's amazing. I can't believe it, that a human being can go through so much, like these women that were left with their families, without their husbands, and I can only speak of my own mother. In the meantime, a very, very dreadful sickness broke out. It was called a cholerya, and a lot of people died. My mother had an only brother, the one that brought us out to work on the tobacco fields to be near him, he died at the age of thirty-six. My brother died at the age of fourteen, and I was twelve, of cholera. All of us had it, but by luck we survived.

LEVINE: Do you know how? How, was there any treatment at that point?

RODMAN: I don't know whether there was any treatment in these little villages, you know, where at that time we lived in a village, but I do know that a lot of people died, because it was a very, very high fever. And, so, my mother, even when the immigration opened up with America, she was afraid to let my father know that he lost his only son. By the Jewish people, a son is very, very important, you know, for the afterworld. And so she didn't let him know that she only had three children instead of four. But she realized, and then my uncle was, also lived in New York with my father,

you know, her sister's husband, and he said, "You've got to tell him. How is he going to feel when you come into Ellis Island with three children? He's got to be notified." She was afraid that he may not want us, you see. That's the fear she had. He may not want us, because the son isn't there. At any rate, they finally did let him know, and needless to say he was happy to have us, you know, anyway. But that was a terrible, traumatic experience for my mother and for all of us.

LEVINE How old?

RODMAN: I remember my brother. I remember him very vividly. And I remember the screaming, because at one time these Pecluras, I mentioned to you, the army that they were fighting, he wore high boots, you know, leather high boots, and they were dragging it off his feet, and i guess they were hurting him. And to this day I remember his screams. So those are memories that stay with you, you know. You can't forget it.

LEVINE: So in other words the army, they would come in and take things?

RODMAN: Oh, anything the, whatever they could, and then go right on, you know. They were running from village to village or from city to city. They were fighting amongst each other. That's how Russia ended up with the Bolsheviks, you know. I guess they were the winners, the communism, you know. That's what remained.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you remember of, of experiencing the fighting?

RODMAN: Well, I think it's enough with the village burning. (laughs).

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

RODMAN: And, as I say, being stranded there, and my brother screaming when they were dragging off the, the boots off of his feet, and this cholera season.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, so when, do you remember the revolution being over?

RODMAN: No, I really don't, because I think I was too young for me to remember it. All we knew is that we were ready to come to America, but in order to come to America you had to do illegal running away, because they wouldn't allow you to leave Russia, see, and we had to get over to Romania.

LEVINE: So how did, did your father send you money? Is that how you were able to get.

RODMAN: Yeah, sure, that's the first thing, money, when you were able to get the money.

LEVINE: So you got the money. And who was traveling with you when you left to go to, over?

RODMAN: Well, my mother's sister with seven children, we were traveling together. But then they left the year before we did because my uncle was already a citizen. So they call the second papers, they allowed those people to come in first. My father only had the first papers, and then by some, something happened, they got lost. So we were stranded in Bucharest, Romania. Bucharest is the capital city of Romania. We were stranded there for ten months waiting for the passport to be organized so we could leave. So we came into the States a little later than my auntie and her children.

LEVINE: What do you remember about those ten months in Bucharest?

RODMAN: I remember living, sharing, we had a room, at a family by the name of Schecter, in an apartment house. We never knew what apartments looked like, you know. And then we had to go, the, the immigration authorities in Romania also, they had to register the immigrants. Every week you had to report. And since I was the oldest, I guess I learned even how to talk Romanian a little bit. I used to shop. Now I don't know a word of Romanian, believe me. But maybe that's why I picked up my acquaintanceship later on, with this Rouanian girl, Yvette, that she made me change to, my name to Irene. (they laugh) Could have been that, you know.

LEVINE: Well, Bucharest must have been the largest city you'd ever?

RODMAN: Yes. Oh, definitely, definitely.

LEVINE: Do you remember what struck you about it?

RODMAN: Nothing particular except the apartment. You know, that was something unusual. And I think I used to go by bus, but I don't have a vivid recollection of that.

LEVINE: Yeah, What, what was your feeling state during this whole time when you picked up and left, went over the border, were in Bucharest and?

RODMAN: I don't, I, to tell you the truth, I don't have any vivid memories of that, except I would say that it was something in fright combined with anticipation, because you're going to see your father, you know, the something you look forward to.

EI-332/RODMAN

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Did you remember your father?

RODMAN: No, because we didn't have any pictures. You know, years ago you didn't even have pictures of each other. Except we knew, you know, from the description. I'm sure my mother remembered.

LEVINE: Yeah.

RODMAN: Except my mother got very, very thin. During those eight years, she lost a lot of weight, and when we came to the United States I'll never forget this, my mother had some differences, naturally, you know, where a husband and wife are separated for eight years, there's bound to be a little change. And apparently she felt that maybe the change came because she was so thin. She lost a lot of weight. And my, before that my father was madly in love with her. He would tear the world apart, you know, to have her. She decided to gain weight. And so I'll tell you how she gained weight? She drank Jersey milk. Nowadays, you know, we don't even want to drink the plain milk because it's fattening, and I don't even think they have it now. It's called the Jersey milk. It had more cream in it. And she got fat. She put on weight. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Where was she drinking this drink?

RODMAN: Right here in Detroit, Detroit, Michigan, when we arrived here. She got nice and heavy, you know. She thought that way she would please my father more, you know, by putting on a little weight. She drank the Jersey milk. And I'll tell you something, I don't think it interfered with her health

because my mother, may she rest in peace, lived to the age of ninety-two. So the cholesterol didn't bother her. (she laughs) It didn't bother her.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let's say, after you got your papers, then, finally, in Bucharest.

RODMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And then you left from there, by train or something? Or how did you . . .

RODMAN: No. Then I think we must have gone to Antwerp to get the boat, come in on the boat.

LEVINE: Were you examined at all, on that side of the, of the, ocean?

RODMAN: We must have been examined, and I'll tell you why. Because my little sister, who was only eight years, seven or, during the travel, her whole head was shaved off, so they were looking for lice with a lot of the people. I had nice curly hair. They called them, like, banana curls. They didn't touch that. Except when I arrived in Detroit, they tried to Americanize me, they cut off the curls for me right away. (laughs). But my sister was, her head, her hair was shaved off. So I guess they did inspect them, you know. They had to do that.

LEVINE: Do you remember the conditions on the boat?

RODMAN: Yes. We were very, very fortunate. We were on the boat. We sat, traveled second class. The third class was all the way down, and every one of them was sick down there. But we traveled second class, and it was very, very nice. And what impressed me and the rest of us was the dessert that they served, the Neapolitan slices of ice cream. We never saw that before! We didn't know what it was like. And, oh, did we delight

in that, the ice cream. (she laughs) That was very nice.

LEVINE: Were there any experiences on the boat that you recall?

RODMAN: Well, I recall one experience. I guess I must have been inquisitive in those days. You know, like I said, I was thirteen years. And we had the stateroom, what you call it on the boat. And I guess I fooled around with buttons, you know, and I pressed some buttons, and all of a sudden a waiter, or whoever you call him on the boat, came and said, "Madam, what do you wish?" And my mother was angry with me. "Stop pressing buttons!" (she laughs) I tried to find out what it's like, you know. But we did, the boat ride was very nice for us, very nice.

LEVINE: So you must have, your father must have sent enough money to . . .

RODMAN: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

LEVINE: . . . travel second class.

RODMAN: Then he came to meet us in New York.

LEVINE: Well, first, tell me, when the boat came into the New York Harbor, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

RODMAN: No, I don't.

LEVINE: And do you remember your first impression of Ellis Island?

RODMAN: I seem to remember like stalls, you know. I don't know how it's built now, but I remember like stalls, you know. And my father did meet us and took us back to Detroit on a Pullman train. I guess he wanted to find us, or

something. (she laughs) Nobody should see us. But it was very nice traveling. You know you

LEVINE: Well, do you think you looked funny? Is that what you mean?

RODMAN: I don't know. I don't think we looked funny, no. We were dressed nice. My mother sewed our own clothing. We were, I think I was a cute little girl with the banana curls, as I say. And my sister, that's a year and three months older, was very, very pretty, too. And then my little sister with the shaved up little head. But, maybe, you know, in those days they used to call the immigrants greenhorns. And that was a terrible label that they gave to all of us, you know. We were very self-conscious about the dialect. We couldn't speak the language, of course, not right away, you know. And a lot of people made fun of the greenhorns, too. It was a terrible era. Nowadays you don't.

LEVINE: So that's why he was . . .

RODMAN: I thought so. I thought maybe he was shielding us, you know, because they had the private Pullman cars, you know, the private compartments. And when we came to Detroit we got the first apartment on the third floor in an apartment building, which was a nice experience for us, too. And then I went to school to learn the language called The Bishop's School, a special school, like where all the immigrants go to learn to speak English a little bit.

LEVINE: Oh.

RODMAN: And then from there they evaluated me, and they put me in the seventh grade.

LEVINE: Wow.

RODMAN: Which wasn't bad, you know. So I went to a school called Lincoln School.

LEVINE: So you must have learned English quickly.

RODMAN: I guess so. I guess. But I remember one experience, I think maybe that turned me off of continuing further education, and education. I had a teacher called Miss Williams. It's funny how certain things stay with you. And in the classroom there was a lot of, there was a mixture, black and white, in those days it didn't matter so much. There were some older children too, than myself. There was a question that she had asked. I guess you had to stand up and give an answer. And instead of saying the word "yes" or "no" I said, "Ha-ha." And she said, "How do you spell it?" And the whole classroom burst out in laughter. And that embarrassed me, you know. It's a funny thing how things stay with you. I was so embarrassed when she said, "How do you spell ha-ha?" I'll never forget her. That was Miss Williams. And I graduated from that school, and then by that time I felt I wanted to go to business school because my father always had a saying, "Money doesn't grow on trees." And, of course, as a teenager you need money, you know. You like clothes, you like to go out. So I thought I'd go to school and learn a trade right away. But that you had to pay twenty-four dollars and ninety-five cents a month tuition. So there was the statement again, money doesn't grow on trees. So I decided to go to a public high school where they teach secretarial work, bookkeeping, and hat's where I went.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what it was like meeting your father, the reunion with your father when you and your mother and sisters came?

RODMAN: I think, I would like to say it was a happy reunion but a strange reunion at the same time, especially for my little sister, because she really didn't know her father, you know. She didn't know. Where my older sister, my younger sister and myself, we did have memories of him, you know. But for her, but then the thought, she always visualized her father, she always prayed for him, I think even more than the rest of us. So it was a happy reunion.

LEVINE: What was it like being around him after not seeing him for most of your life?

RODMAN: I don't think it was as close as we would have been had we not been separated for eight years, because we were very, very close with our mother, see. You had only one person to relate to, and especially under the circumstances that we lived, under all those treacherous ways and the dangerous ways, and your mother was the only one there to save you. So we were very, very attached to our mother. We clung to her.

LEVINE: So that attachment just wasn't, wasn't made.

RODMAN: No, no. Circumstances created it.

LEVINE: Right.

RODMAN: As a matter of fact, I think the problem that my father and my mother had in getting together again as husband and wife, there was a, I would think now, in retrospect, that there was a little jealousy on my father's part, because he felt that the mother was totally devoted to the children, see, which happens very often when children are born, even in the normal circumstances. So I think that was a little bit of a disruption in their life, too, that I can see it now. Because my mother was so protective of the

children, and we as children were very protective of her, you know. But we loved our father, and he loved us, too. There's no question about it, you know.

LEVINE: So, we have about ten minutes.

RODMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: So then how did you meet your husband?

RODMAN: Oh, I wish . . . (she laughs) I was going to wonder when you were going to ask that. (they laugh) Before we came to America, my father, in those days they called them boarders. They lived with people, and they rented a room, you know. He lived with a family by the name of Rodman. He rented a room there, okay. And that family had two sisters, Bessie and Paulie. They were married already. They were much older than my husband, and my husband at the time must have been about sixteen, fifteen, sixteen maybe. And I remember when, as I say, the Bessie, the older daughter is the one that was so close with my father because he lived in their house, you know, he was a boarder there. So they were Americanized already. They originally came from Providence, Rhode Island. And so they took me to the barber shop to cut my hair off right away, and they took an interest, of course, you know, in the family. And I remember that when my husband came in, my husband was always very athletically inclined, and he was skinny. Well, I noticed that his pants were almost halfway down on him, you know, from playing outside, that's how I met him, when he was a youngster. We were young. We never paid attention to each other even. But it turned out that later on, my father was in the laundry business, but later on he went into the wastepaper business, and my husband's father also had a little shop, and of course these people knew each other so well. And my husband worked in his

father's junk shop. They called them junk shops at the time. And I don't know, was by am..., in-advertently, you know, the families got together, and my husband's family, they were very orthodox, and they were so concerned about him going with a Jewish girl. They were afraid he was going to end up with a shiksa. In those days it was a terrible, terrible thing. And I think that, actually, they were more influential in getting my husband to look at me than he wanted to look at me. (she laughs) I always felt I don't think he was in love with me. The family pushed him into it. I really sincerely mean it. His sisters were crazy about me. They were older. And they got us together somehow, and then he began to come into the house, and I taught him how to dance. He didn't know how to dance. And I went out with some girls already. We had used to go to dances.

LEVINE: How did you learn?

RODMAN: From my friends, going with my friends. I met this Yvette, this Romanian girl, and another one, Belle Stevens, who is a friend of mine to this day. We're inseparable. We may not like exactly what we do, but it's like family members, you know. So that's how I met my husband, and to this day I truly feel, I don't think he was in love with me. He really wasn't. But the family, the family was in love with me more than he was, see. But we survived, somehow, the marriage. (she laughs Oh, for over sixty years, marriage.

LEVINE: Wow.

RODMAN: My husband died five years ago, May the 5th. And then we didn't, we were blessed with our two daughters.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

RODMAN: Joan and Anita. And Joan was born to us after eleven-and-a-half years of marriage, which was a miracle. And then two years later her sister Anita was born.

LEVINE: So do you have grandchildren now, too?

RODMAN: I have my daughter Anita that lives in Oak Park, Michigan, near me. She has a son by the name of Alex. He's twenty-four years old, my pride and joy. And my second pride and joy is Joan's adopted daughter. She adopted Anna Claudia from Brazil. She adopted her, she was four-and-a-half years old. At the time my husband and I, my husband particularly, felt she shouldn't adopt a child. She's an only mother, a single mother, I should say. But she didn't listen to us. She presented us with a granddaughter. (they laughs) And thank God my husband was able to meet her. He was already ill at the time. He was fighting cancer. But he loved her. Everybody loves children, you know. And we always felt by adopting a child it's doing a great deed, it's a good deed, and so that's, my daughter Joan selected to do that, she has our blessings. And we love her, we love her. We truly do. So I always said that I'm blessed. I have a beautiful family, two daughters, two grandchildren. Love to have more, but for the time being I'll be satisfied. I had a nice note from my grandson the other day for Mother's Day, and he calls me "The Magical Grandma". And he said to me in the note, he said, "Grandma." , and he knows that all of my contemporaries are great-grandmothers already, and I always kid him I'd love to be one. He says, "Grandma, I'm going to try very, very, to hurry to make you a great, how to say, a great magical grandma." You know what I answered him? "Don't rush on my account." (they laugh) I said, "Take your time. I want to be sure that you're going to make the right choice." And I truly feel that I'm very, very blessed, that God was good to me all these years. Now I'm eighty-five.

LEVINE: How, what do you feel, being born in Russia and the Ukraine and living through what you did there, and then coming to this country? How do you think that's influenced you, or what?

RODMAN: I truly feel, I mean, I hate to impose on humanity hardship, I shouldn't do that. But I think in living through some hard times in your life makes you a better person, and I think it makes you appreciate life more, humanity more, and being willing to share your blessings with others. I have been a volunteer all my life, really. As my mother used to tell me when I was a little girl I used to help out little children, so that's a born instinct more or less. But then later on I have been a volunteer and I give a lot of services, and I feel I want to share my life, my blessings, with people that need it. And I hope and pray that I can continue now in old age. Primarily my biggest hope is that I shouldn't become a responsibility for my children, you know, not to impose on them. And I hope and pray I can continue. I drive a car. I'm very independent.

LEVINE: You look wonderful.

RODMAN: Thank you, thank you. I live alone in a house. My daughter, Joan, can't understand why I don't want to go into an apartment. But not yet, I'm not ready, you know. When I will be, I will. So I thank God I'm not an overly religious person, but I do believe in something that guides us, and we're being guided, and the rest we have to do ourselves. My mother always used to say, "God will help you if you help yourself." You got to work together. And so that's, that's the motto of life, you know. Be good to yourself, be good to other people, and accept your blessings. Don't whine, and don't complain.

LEVINE: That sounds like a good place to end.

RODMAN: Very good.

LEVINE: I want to thank you very much.

RODMAN: Well, thank you, thank you.

LEVINE: I'm so happy I got to talk with you.

RODMAN: Thank you. My pleasure to meet you, too. And you're doing wonderful work by recording this.

LEVINE: Oh. You are among the national treasures.

RODMAN: (laughs) Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you very much.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been speaking with Irene Goldberg Rodman. It's May 29, 1993, and I'm signing off.