

EI-353

MAX MUSNIKOW

BIRTH DATE: JULY 15, 1895

INTERVIEW DATE: 7/20/1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:04:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: DAUGHTERS OF MIRIAM HOME
CLIFTON, NJ

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY CHARLES MITCHELL, 3/2007

RUSSIA, 1923

AGE 28

PASSAGE ON "THE PARIS"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: RIGA

RESIDENCES: RUSSIA: KIEV

US: BROOKLYN, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.
I'm here today with Max . . .

MUSNIKOW: Musnikow, Musnikow. M-U-S-N-I-K-O-W.

LEVINE: Great. And we're here in Clifton, New Jersey, and
it's July 20, 1993. Max is ninety-eight years old,
and he came from Russia . . .

MUSNIKOW: In 1923.

LEVINE: In 1923, when he was twenty-seven.

MUSNIKOW: Twenty-eight.

LEVINE: Twenty-eight.

MUSNIKOW: I was twenty-eight.

LEVINE: Twenty-eight years old. Okay.

MUSNIKOW: I came here, I came here with my wife and two-and-a-half children. If you'll ask me what it means two-and-a-half, it means born, my older son was two years, three-and-a-half, and she was pregnant six months later, when we were here in New York she gave birth to my younger son. He is now also here, that's what I got, Freddie, Fred Musnikow. I had a daughter. (he pauses) Wow. I have to cry. I don't want to cry. She was fifty-four years. Everybody who knows the Workman's Circle knew Rose, Rose Musnikow. She was a marvelous woman. And by fifty-four years old she died, and I don't even know from what, why she died. She was married. She left a son here, a nice, he's a very, he's got a big job, he's somebody, you know, here. But she died fifty-four years old.

LEVINE: I'm sorry to hear that.

MUSNIKOW: So I remained, thank God, God bless, two son.

LEVINE: Freddie and . . .

MUSNIKOW: Freddie's the youngest, and the oldest is Sammy. Sammy is a somebody also. Sammy's got the, I could tell you, but it will take away. He's got property in the Yerushaliam in Israel. He's got over a million dollars worth. He made very good here. The youngest is also not a poor fellow. He hasn't got so much, but he has a little bit, but he's got enough. He just, he had a beautiful wife, she died, she was a young woman. She was about fifty-four, I think. And he remarried, he's got a wonderful woman. They're happy, both together. They're happy. And I'm, I see them, they come in here very often, I come there. So when I see, and I see how happy they are, I'm glad, I'm happy, too, because sometimes people marry and it doesn't click. But this, thank God, they're all right. And money, I got enough. I got every month, every year, I'll say. Every year when I'm getting older, I'm getting richer, because my income, I'll never spend. I haven't got even examine here, and I don't bring them. They're very nice. You know, a man has got to have a woman, so together. But I

don't, I've been good to everybody. They ask me downstairs, "Max." They don't have to say Musnikow. Some of them, they don't know even it's Musnikow. But ask them about Max, I'm sure they wouldn't tell you bad things. I'm sure.

LEVINE: Well, Max, let's start at the beginning. Tell me when you were born.

MUSNIKOW: I was born in Russia, you know. You know what's happened? My father, on the (?). You know (?). He asked my mother, and she said yes, so by then I was born.

LEVINE: (she laughs) Do you remember what date?

MUSNIKOW: The date?

LEVINE: Your birthday?

MUSNIKOW: My birthday? July, in English it's July the 15th, I think. Yeah, July the 15th.

LEVINE: Just this past week was July 15th.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Oh, they send me here a, from here . . .

LEVINE: July 15, 1895.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, yeah, 1895. Right, 1895. Yeah, 1895.

LEVINE: So you just turned ninety-eight.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, I was ninety-eight in July, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, you look, I have to say, you may not feel well,
but you look beautiful. You look wonderful.

MUSNIKOW: I don't feel, still I was in Israel a couple of weeks
ago.

LEVINE: Well, maybe you'll . . .

MUSNIKOW: I got there family. I was there, and I had a
wonderful time. I was singing to them. And I could
sing Hebrew.

LEVINE: Really? Sing a little song.

MUSNIKOW: In Yiddish, anything. In Yiddish I could say, (he
sings in Yiddish). You know, (he sings in
Yiddish) It's not so good. I sing much better, but
I don't feel so good. So you wouldn't mind.

LEVINE: It sounds beautiful.

MUSNIKOW: I try my best. (he sings in Yiddish) That's
enough.

LEVINE: Beautiful, thank you, thank you.

MUSNIKOW: But I don't feel so good. Since I came, I came a couple of weeks, I came from Israel. I was eleven days. And since I came there, I don't like.

LEVINE: You'll come back to yourself.

MUSNIKOW: I hope so, yes. At my age, you know, I shouldn't complain, you know. They say in Jewish, they say (Yiddish). That means, "If you want to be happy, don't look up, but look down. Look for people that are worse off than you are." You see? And I always looked that, if I sometimes am not in the mood, you know, everybody is not always in the mood, in a good mood. So I say to myself, "Max, (Yiddish)." That means, "Don't look up, but look down. Look people that they are worse than you." Thank God I'm here, I came in here, in here, when I came in there they don't take no money for that. They're not supposed to take money, but donation they could take. And I gave a nice donation here, and I didn't ask, I got two sons, I didn't ask them they should help me out. I took out from my account, and I gave the donation here. You know? So I'm happy. Some people, they

haven't got, they want to spend, they smoking, suppose, cigarettes. They want to buy cigarettes, they have no money. I just have, and I don't smoke, I never smoked in my life. But if I need a donation somewhere, like in the (?), I give out a few dollars sometimes, you know, in donation.

LEVINE: Tell me first about Kiev.

MUSNIKOW: Kiev.

LEVINE: What was life . . .

MUSNIKOW: Kiev is a wonderful girl, a wonderful city.

LEVINE: Tell me what it was like for you when you lived there.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, when I was there I, when I was there, I, in Kiev they couldn't, Jewish people been out a lot to, they didn't have (Russian). (Russian), that means rightness, and (Russian), to live. I didn't have the right to live in Kiev because I am a Jew. But, still, I was twenty-one, and I went to the army, the Russian Army, so I had, I could live with my parents. My parents, they couldn't live also in Kiev, but if he was a mechanic, he had, he used to, he used to,

you know, how they call, he used to books, a book simply get (?). She build them, like, from the schul, from the synagogue. They're getting his (?) and everything, he used to bring them in the house and he would fix them. So he had a little shop in the house, a little shop. He had a machine, I remember a machine, he put in to cut the edges and you pull a, a . . .

LEVINE: A lever?

MUSNIKOW: A lever, yeah. You pulled, and it used to cut everything. You didn't have to work with the hands. You got that . . .

LEVINE: Books? It would cut off the books?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. He brought from the schul, from the synagogue, (Hebrew), (Hebrew), you know, the prayers, prayer books. In Yiddish, in Jewish it's (Yiddish).

LEVINE: Be careful now, you have the microphone.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, no, no, just for a second.

LEVINE: You want me to take it off?

MUSNIKOW: I think I'll . . . Just a second, just a second.

(referring to the microphone) All right. All right. (he shows a)

LEVINE: Ah, so this is the kind of thing he worked on?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And he would cut . . .

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Oh, this.

LEVINE: I see. He would cut the pages.

MUSNIKOW: The pages.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MUSNIKOW: They used to, before, before we had this machine we used to put in a, on a table and two sides, they closed.

LEVINE: Like a . . .

MUSNIKOW: And then they used to cut it, it was very hard. And later on, we had the machine.

LEVINE: They clamped them on the table and cut by hand before.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Well . . .

MUSNIKOW: I'd gotten used something.

LEVINE: What was your . . .

MUSNIKOW: We weren't able to leave. I could (?).

LEVINE: What it says in the book?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. December 1985, the (?), that's not interesting. Well, maybe yes. With (?). So then, oh (?). That's when they work in a circle, schools. So they give me, that's what they gave me, a (Yiddish). A (Yiddish) means they give somebody, if I give you something, what it means?

LEVINE: A gift?

MUSNIKOW: A gift. That's all, a gift, yeah.

LEVINE: Well . . .

MUSNIKOW: But I don't know if . . .

LEVINE: You got this from the Workman's Circle?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course.

LEVINE: Why did they give you this gift?

MUSNIKOW: Because I was a good member. (Dr. Levine laughs)
They don't give to everybody.

LEVINE: Let's . . .

MUSNIKOW: Hold it, hold it, hold it, hold it. Can I go to
that, to there?

LEVINE: I tell you what. Why don't we first talk about your
early life in Russia, then you can show me things.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Could I show you what I got from there, from
there?

LEVINE: Good. Okay, wait. I'll turn this off for a minute
while you get it. (referring to the microphone)
Okay. We're resuming now after looking at some
awards that Max received. So tell me when you were a
boy . . .

MUSNIKOW: When I was a boy, I was a wonderful, of all the, a
wonderful Jewish life. I, if I had a piece of bread
in the house every day I was happy. But I remember,
let's see, if I would live another ten years, even
twenty years, because I wouldn't live so long, but if

it happened, a miracle could happen. I had a mother, I think a Yiddish mama, a Yiddish mama. That means a Jewish mother. All the Jewish mothers are very nice, very good. But my mother, exceptional, a very nice woman. When we had in the house a small piece of bread she used to, now I realize, of course, when I was a kid, ten, eleven years old, I don't know, I didn't figure things got to go like that, she didn't eat the piece of bread, she gave it to me. And we had plenty, plenty, plenty days and weeks where we didn't have to eat, we didn't have bread enough. But . . .

LEVINE: Now, what was your mother's name?

MUSNIKOW: Freida Doba.

LEVINE: D-O-B . . .

MUSNIKOW: Freida Doba. In Yiddish I could write right away. Freida, Freida.

LEVINE: And what was, Do . . .

MUSNIKOW: Doba. The two, my name is Moshe Mochaim.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember your mother's maiden name?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, Cohen, Cohen.

LEVINE: Cohen. And how about your father, what was his name?

MUSNIKOW: It's Schemer. Schemer (?) Yitzak. That's a son to
(?) Yitzak. Yeah, I remember, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters living at home
in Russia?

MUSNIKOW: In Russia I had one brother, one brother, but he died
very young, yeah.

LEVINE: What, did you go to school?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, yeah. I went to school, yeah, in a cheder, a
Jewish school, sure, I went to school.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about the school?

MUSNIKOW: Ah, I remember a lot of things. I remember, you
know, I remember even songs where I used to, I had a
wonderful voice. Now I'm older, so, but I had a
wonderful voice when I was young. I remember, I went
once in a, in a, and the people, somebody from the
family, they took me on a Friday night, they took me
in a theater. It was a Ukraine theater, in Russia,
that. They were speaking Russian. But I understood

Russian very well. And when I came back, and next Sunday, it's a Friday night we went there. And when I came back Sunday, now it just came in my head, I remember. So then I came in school, in school. In the school they learned Yiddish, Jewish and Hebrew. I could say, "(Hebrew)." You know when I used to sing this? Eighty years ago. And I remember, I don't know how it is, but I remember. You know what happened? A small thing happened. I belong to the Y, here, the Y. So once we were there about fifty, sixty people. And a couple, a husband with a wife, came from Petersburg. Now it's, years ago it was Petersburg, now it's Petragrad, Petragrad, but the same city. The Jewish, the Jewish people, nice, a beautiful, nice couple, but they can't speak a word of Yiddish, Jewish, they can't. So I said, and I didn't speak Jewish, Yiddish, because I came here, I worked between Yiddish, Yiddish and Jewish people. But the Russian, I didn't have to speak. But I remember, still I remember. So they started to, so they wanted to tell us something, but they couldn't, they couldn't speak Yiddish, only Russian. So I said, "Try it, I'll try it." What's happened. And you'll be surprised that still I'm not lying to you

because it's not, you don't pay to me, and even if you would pay to me I wouldn't take it, because I don't need it, I don't need it. I got enough. Like I felt in the beginning, every year I'm getting a little richer because I don't spend so much. I don't need it so much. I don't run around. I had one wife, one wife in my life, one girl. I lived with her sixty-seven good years. I didn't go from here to that corner without her. Pesachzeit, that's Easter, Jewish Easter, we used to go in Florida. For nineteen seasons we went there, and I never went without her. We had a wonderful life. If she would be still alive now, I wouldn't be so depressed. But what else can I, what can I tell you.

LEVINE: Tell me about, do you remember . . .

MUSNIKOW: Kiev, Kiev. Kiev, I remember, was wonderful. If I would come here, I went, I left there in 19, in 1923 I came here, so it's so many years. But I'm sure if I would come on the, on the Voksal, from the Voksal in Russia, because Voksal The place from where the trains come in here, I wouldn't have to ask nobody to come down. And I used to, there was just like in here. Downtown, like in New York, downtown and

uptown, you know. There was Podol. Podol was, the Jewish people used to live there.

LEVINE: Pardo?

MUSNIKOW: Podol, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what . . .

MUSNIKOW: P-O-D-O-L. Podol, yes. That's in Russian. But in Yiddish, in English, how could you say, that's the same thing, yeah.

LEVINE: So describe what that was like. What was the Pardol like?

MUSNIKOW: Pardol, the poorest people in the city, like in here they got, downtown they got a section, I don't know. I think, you should know better, you know, here in New York.

LEVINE: New York I know, yes.

MUSNIKOW: In New York. New York, you know, the downtown it's poorer than the richest living uptown area. The same was Pardol, there, I lived all my life, I was born there. My father's name was Schleme, and my mother's father.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I remember, I couldn't forget that house, you can't forget.

LEVINE: Tell it to me, so I can have it.

MUSNIKOW: That's why I'm telling, why you couldn't forget the house where you lived, because when it used to rain we had all rain in the house. I remember. Just now we used to put in buckets, it shouldn't come in. We were so poor. Because a better house, we couldn't afford to live. My father was, he was a (Yiddish). He used to, he was a bookbinder. And he used to take from the schul, so he used to take a (?), a (?) a prayer. A prayer, with book. So he was cutting a hundred pieces, and he used to, to patch them up, to patch them up. And he used to take eight, I remember, eight cents, eight kopeks. In Russian that's called kopeks, kopekas. Kopeke, kopeke. That means more than one. Kopeka, it's one, one penny, but kopeke, it's more than one penny. Two, three, four, five and ten, that's kopeke. That's Russian, I still remember. I don't know why, but I remember.

LEVINE: What did your house look like?

MUSNIKOW: Huh?

LEVINE: What did your house look like?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, I'm telling you. It was, here the poorest people, they probably don't understand. They haven't got a lot. And when you saw rain, you used to go, all the rain in the house, we used to put in buckets. I had a mother. Every Jewish mother, they're good mothers, every Jewish mother. Not (?), but I wouldn't deny and I wouldn't say no, because I know it. But a mother like I had? Freide, Freide Doba was her name. She was a marvelous woman. She was a mother, plenty, the only one, one day we were right, Friday night, Saturday. She didn't, we didn't eat all week. We, she used to cook the (?) together, hold it for shabbas, you know. Why? Because Jewish people they say the middle of the week you eat, if you got what to eat. If you don't eat, too bad. But Saturday they, it's a sin, it's a sin for God not to eat. So she used to . . . (he laughs) She used to keep both together. She used to save, save, save all week. But Friday night, we used to sing. We

used to sing, (he sings in Yiddish). I don't remember exactly, but . . .

LEVINE: Did you have a job after you went to school?

MUSNIKOW: No, I had, I had a job when I was in school, too, I used to have a job.

LEVINE: What was your job?

MUSNIKOW: I used to do, I used to help out something, to bring something. When the neighbor asked me there, so to make two or three pennies. That's how much they used to pay at that time, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you went in the Russian Army?

MUSNIKOW: I went in the Russian Army in 1917.

LEVINE: And tell me what your experience was.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, there it was terrible. There it was terrible. But I was there, in 1917 I went in the army. I got, what to show from the army.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MUSNIKOW: See, I wash everything myself. It would be, if it wouldn't be clean I wouldn't show it to you.

LEVINE: It's very clean.

MUSNIKOW: I'm dumb, but not so dumb.

LEVINE: (she laughs) I don't think you're dumb at all.

MUSNIKOW: I must show you this.

LEVINE: This is your water, oh, yeah. Hmm. Uh-huh. So,
what . . .

MUSNIKOW: This is from the army, from 1917, from the war of the
world. The Russian, the Russians with the, with the
Japanese.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Where were you, where were you stationed in the army?
Where did you go?

MUSNIKOW: They, you see, there was a law. If I was living,
supposed, in New York, in New York. Now, I'll give
you something to understand what I mean. If I lived
in New York and I have to go to the army, so they
wouldn't take me from New York. And I was born in
Mugilov. Mugilov, it's a small town. So my parents

was there. They lived, they was born there. But I was born in Kiev, in Kiev, I was born. (Yiddish) I remember that he was, he used to be, he was a (?) man. He used to supply from the, at that time the (?), the (?), the commander, the (?). When they hear the fire, fire engine, fire engine, he used to give, tell them (Yiddish). (Yiddish), that means, the horses eat them. What they eat, them?

LEVINE: Hay.

MUSNIKOW: No, not the second. Except the hay. Horses eat . . .

LEVINE: Oats?

MUSNIKOW: Oats, oats, yeah, yeah. That's called (Yiddish). In Russian it's (Russian). I don't know how it is.

LEVINE: So what else do you remember about being in the army?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, don't ask. I even (?) in the army. (?) But, anyway, I went there, and then they . . .

LEVINE: When did you get out of the army?

MUSNIKOW: I went out, I got out in 1917.

LEVINE: When you . . .

MUSNIKOW: No, and I was, I was, the '17, in Moscow. I had in Moscow. (?), just so you remember, (?). The house. (Russian) is house. Why is (Russian) house? Because (Russian) was a Jewish man, he was a rich man, and he was the original man who used to stop, at that time was no railroads, there was no railroads, you know, there was no railroads. You don't know, but I know it. They could look in a book somewhere, there was no rail. He was the first one who started to build the railways. And he had, so when I came, when they took me on the, from the train, they took me off. So they sent me, he had a house, and they used to keep all the Jewish, Jewish boys. So a little one, I remember, I can mention that, a little man, a little short one. He was sitting on the, by the train, in the war, when they used, when they came. So they looked for Jewish people, only Jewish, and they used to put them on the side, and they used to send them. And I was there about three years, I was there. I was in (?). I have the pictures, but I don't know where. They're gorgeous.

LEVINE: What?

MUSNIKOW: Gorgeous, gorgeous, yeah. I couldn't walk.

LEVINE: From that, uh-huh.

MUSNIKOW: Sure, I couldn't walk.

LEVINE: Well, how . . . Go ahead.

MUSNIKOW: No, that's all right.

LEVINE: You were there three years.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Three years I was in Moscow. The (Russian).
That's Palako. That's the first Jewish man who used
to build the railing, the regular railing. And he
had there (Russian). (Russian) was the hospital.

LEVINE: The hospital, right.

MUSNIKOW: The (Russian), like in the, like in here was a
section, a section. That's more than one street. It
was a lot of streets. But the old section called
Staganka, Wolonsolskaya, Dwatsatsachira, Donpelakova.
So they sent me there, and I was there about three
years, with crutches.

LEVINE: And what did you do when you left there?

MUSNIKOW: They gave us to eat, and that's all. I was laying in, on the hospital. But I was with crutches. But I remember I was so strong. There the street, the street, a trolley car. Now, here we haven't got none. But that time was trolley car. So I used to go away somewhere, what is it there. So I never, in, our house was on the middle of the street. So the trolley car stops on this corner, or on that corner. I never, I never wait for this corner or this corner. I used to hold my crutches, and I used to make nice (?). Never, never, you would believe me, it's true, I'm not lying.

LEVINE: You jumped on the moving trolley car?

MUSNIKOW: On the moving trolley car. I was so strong. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how did you, why did you decide to come to America?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, I had here a sister, an older sister, a sister and a brother-in-law, my sister's husband. He had a shop, Morris Cohen, downtown, downtown.

LEVINE: What was the shop?

MUSNIKOW: Morris, Morris, Morris.

LEVINE: Morris, uh-huh.

MUSNIKOW: Cohen, Cohen, Cohen.

LEVINE: Cohen, uh-huh.

MUSNIKOW: I say "Cahen." It's Cahen, but it's Cohen, Morris
Cohen, a shop.

LEVINE: What kind of shop?

MUSNIKOW: A tailor shop, where he had a lot of people used to
work there. He had two sons in the, were in the
business, everything. But he was a diamond of a man,
a diamond. I don't know, I never saw, still, I saw
so many people, I never saw such a nice man. A
golden man, a golden man, I'm telling you.

LEVINE: Now, did Morris . . .

MUSNIKOW: Morris Cohen.

LEVINE: And what was your sister's name?

MUSNIKOW: Hannah Riva. Hannah, Hannah Riva.

LEVINE: Anna Lever. Was she, did they send you a ticket?

MUSNIKOW: They brought me, they brought me here. Why they

brought me, I had my old mother, my old mother. I was, I was Ellis Island. I was there all day. I came in the morning, and Friday night they let me off. Why? On account of my mother.

LEVINE: Now, let me see. It was you and your mother who came together?

MUSNIKOW: I came, I came and my mother, and my older son was a little one, about two years old, about two-and-a-half.

LEVINE: Oh, so you . . .

MUSNIKOW: I got, our son is seventy years old. Two sons.

LEVINE: Oh. So tell me how you met your wife. You met your wife in Russia.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, of course, we met in Russia.

LEVINE: How did you meet her?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, in Russia, we, she, I'm older with her, with two years. She had a brother, Nathan, two years older than her, my age. We were friends. And I was with her, we were so nice. We, now, in the nighttime, I wouldn't go, but twelve o'clock, one o'clock, two

o'clock in the night. Would I go in the street? You would go? No. But there we didn't, we weren't afraid. Not far from us, about twenty blocks, maybe, there was the Dneper, the river, Dneper. Mark it down if you want.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

MUSNIKOW: Dneper, D-N-E, Dne, P-E-R, Dneper. That's what, I don't know how to spell it in English, but . . .

LEVINE: That's okay.

MUSNIKOW: But that's the Russian. Yeah. Russian I could, I could read Russian. I never forget. So, well, what's happened when I start to talk you, that the . . .

LEVINE: Your wife.

MUSNIKOW: We came here, we came here, a couple came here. We were there, I belong in (?). We were there, a lot of people, about fifty or sixty people there. A couple of people came from Petersburg, from Petrograd. From Petersburg. They came, a husband and a wife. They Yiddish and Jewish, but they couldn't speak a word of Yiddish, but they speak Russian.

LEVINE: Tell me . . .

MUSNIKOW: I speak to them in Russian. So I said, that's what I want to tell you. Sixty years I was here, I worked here to make a living. When we came here I said to my wife, "Manny," Manny was her name, "you sit home. You will . . ." She was a belaschmaker. Bela is wife, wife. A wife, now she wants a brassiere, it was. A woman wants a brassiere, like something, underwear, she goes and sew. Then, at that time, you couldn't do that, here in this country. There wasn't. So she wanted, she used to work, but the brassieres, she used to, it was a Jewish woman, she had a shop, and she worked. When we got married, I said, "Manny, I'll work, and I'll make a living. Whatever I make will be enough for us, and you won't go no more." That's all. The day after we got married, we had a nice (?), a beautiful. We had a beautiful ceremony, a wedding ceremony. Oh, we had a beautiful ceremony at that time. And I . . .

LEVINE: Can you describe it? What was it like, the wedding?

MUSNIKOW: Oh, I wish I could . . . (he looks for a picture)

LEVINE: Now, don't show me a picture now.

MUSNIKOW: No, I wouldn't show it to you, but I don't remember if I got something right now.

LEVINE: Be careful, you have . . . (referring to the microphone) Okay, we're stopping. (break in tape) (a music box is heard playing) Okay, we're resuming, having gotten a music box. Where did you get that, Max?

MUSNIKOW: I should remember? I bought it somewhere. On the floor, you see. You couldn't. Well, sometimes, she showed this. I was in Israel last year. I bought a scarf.

LEVINE: Tell me . . .

MUSNIKOW: That's what she did for me. You don't know what she did for me. She took off the gas. I don't know. They complained. Here it was a fire from the gas. It was something in a different house, but they mixed up the information, that they gave it to the office, so they took away, so we didn't have our little, a glass of hot water. So I got in here, I got in there. That's a beautiful, that we didn't, take a

look, take a look if you're not lazy. Make the light here, the light make.

LEVINE: I don't need it.

MUSNIKOW: Open, open, open.

LEVINE: This?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh!

MUSNIKOW: I put in water, and I, till they connect it, in two minutes I got tea.

LEVINE: Tell me now about after you got married. What did you do for work?

MUSNIKOW: I was a paperhanger.

LEVINE: A paperhanger.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, now they're making five, six hundred dollars a day. And all Kiev, Kiev, it was a big city, it was over three hundred and fifty thousand people was there. A big city, just like in here. I don't know, in the, in the, a big city over there, very big. Here is a big city. I was a paperhanger. I was, I

used to paper ceilings, walls, everything. I was, I was a good mechanic. Yeah, I made a nice living. So I said to my wife, "Manny, you should, if you're going to have children, you'll take care of the children." I got two sons.

LEVINE: Did you have any of your sons there?

MUSNIKOW: Who? The everything, the youngest, Freddie. Freddie and Sammy. Sammy is a rich man. Sammy's got, in Israel he's got.

LEVINE: Tell me about when, tell me about when your, you were sent the tickets to come . . .

MUSNIKOW: To come here.

LEVINE: Who did you travel with?

MUSNIKOW: I had, you see, I couldn't, I couldn't leave Russia.

LEVINE: Why?

MUSNIKOW: Because I was a young boy, twenty-eight years old, at that time.

LEVINE: Because you were in the army?

MUSNIKOW: Twenty-eight, figure it out, we'll see.

LEVINE: Why couldn't you leave?

MUSNIKOW: Because I'm a young man. They wouldn't let me out.

But I had my, so I, I had my wife. I had, and I had the older son, was about two years old. Yes, Sammy must be about seventy now, something like that.

LEVINE: And you had your mother.

MUSNIKOW: Oh, yes, and I had my mother. So my mother, too, she was an old woman, and a thin one. A nice woman with a very nice. She had, at that time, in Kiev, in Russia, she had a piece of bread, (Yiddish).

LEVINE: So you were sent the ticket by your sister and brother-in-law.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Morris Cohen and Anna Cohen. Yeah, they had a shop in . . . Clothes, clothing, clothing, yeah, a clothing shop, downtown in, I forgot the street. I remember that, Morris Cohen, yeah. They were very nice. He was a nice man, a golden mensch.

LEVINE: Tell me where you left from. Where did the ship go from?

MUSNIKOW: From, uh, from, uh, now I forgot the name of the

ship, from, uh . . . Even the ship, I remember the ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

MUSNIKOW: Of course I remember the name of the ship, of course I know. The Paris, the Paris.

LEVINE: Oh.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah, from Paris. (Yiddish) I came, I had to, so they had to, so from Kiev I couldn't go out. I had to, I had to still be the border, called (Yiddish), (Yiddish), in Jewish. (Yiddish) means still, and (Yiddish) the border. So . . .

LEVINE: How did you do it?

MUSNIKOW: So I had plenty, the Riga, the Riga. I remember the girl. She (Yiddish). And we came in there, they came in the night time, and came in the night, Friday night. So they took me there in the basement of the whole (?). And I was, but for me it wasn't not so bad, it was for my mother, for my mother. She was a skinny, skinny woman. I never imagine. And she was afraid. That's, maybe, too, something. But we came, we came here. We came here, in Riga. We had to come

to, to come to America. So . . .

LEVINE: Did you have to go through examinations on the ship?
Do you remember anything like that?

MUSNIKOW: On the ship? Before I came on the ship, I came, in Riga. In Riga I had the ship there. I picked up from there with the ship, so how could I, I had to come there, but I can't, I couldn't come. They . . .

LEVINE: They wouldn't let you come.

MUSNIKOW: They wouldn't let me out. But I managed. Friday night, Ellis Island. It was, Ellis Island, we were there in the night. It was already dark. And the, what was (?), how you call that, it runs on the water. It's able to sail here, to New York. What they call that?

LEVINE: A little ferry boat?

MUSNIKOW: The ferry, yeah. So we had to wait till the last, the last one. We were afraid they wouldn't, they wouldn't write, they kept my mother. They kept her, and they didn't let her out. You know, she was very skinny. You are a skinny girl, but she's half like you. You are a big girl against her, you know what I

mean? And she was afraid, she was afraid, too. So we were waiting till the last, the last, we came from Ellis Island and came over here. So when we came in here, my brother-in-law, my sister's, Cohen. He was a very nice man. He was waiting, on this side. He was waiting until we came, we came here, into a car.

And they lived in Viona Street, 248 Viona Street, in Brooklyn. Yeah. So she brought me there, and they brought me, you know, they brought me Friday, Friday night, I was on Saturday. Sunday morning I had there a paster, and I was a paperhanger. Painting, I used to, if I didn't want to stay in there to eat, (?) eat. And I didn't have money there, I didn't have money. Some people, very little. They brought a few dollars from Russia. But I didn't have so much. So I went. Sunday morning I was up, and then that was elevator. Went straight till Brooklyn Bridge. Brooklyn Bridge, downstairs, I went there. They brought me, I took the train till 125th Street. And 125th I changed for the local to Brook Avenue. And there I worked, I worked a lot of time, a couple of years. And then I moved in, across the street was a German Jew. He had twenty-nine tenants, so he had, so I took from him a job, a job there.

LEVINE: And what did . . .

MUSNIKOW: And I used to work, I used to work. In the beginning, I asked, a little while, I used to live in Brooklyn. I just, in the evening. I used to take the, five o'clock I was finished the job, take the train, and I used to go in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: How much did you make a week, do you remember?

MUSNIKOW: I didn't make much. They didn't pay top dollar.

LEVINE: But what did you do after you left there?

MUSNIKOW: There, when I left, I took for myself. I used to work for myself.

LEVINE: As a paperhanger?

MUSNIKOW: A paperhanger, sure. In painting, I moved in, in 138th Street, because doctor, what's his name, a German Jew. We reached (?). So I took from him an apartment, and then I start to work for him. He was, he had a name, everybody used to give work, everybody, but not pay. They didn't pay, they didn't pay. What's his name? A German Jew. A big man, a nice, beautiful man. What, you see, (?) people, they

knew already he doesn't pay. There was carpenters work for him, painters, painting everything, the plumbers, he didn't pay, but me he paid. I don't know why.

LEVINE: So then . . .

MUSNIKOW: When he came, so I moved in, I find there, yeah. So I used to use in Brooklyn, my sister. So finally I got here an apartment on the second floor. So I left it there, and everything, money, I used to take. There was a time, the El. The El used to, big, 125th Street. I don't know how, I had, on a piece of paper I had an address, you know. In Russian I could read, I could read a good Russian, in Yiddish. In Russian, Russian, I could read. So, it wasn't so bad for me. I used to go to 125th Street and, because on the express, on the other side is a local, two stops. It was on the . . .

LEVINE: Brook?

MUSNIKOW: Brook Avenue, it's no. First it's a different station. Third Avenue, and then Brook Avenue.

LEVINE: So did you stay a paperhanger? Is that what you did

for work in life?

MUSNIKOW: Yeah. Right away, I find a job right away.

LEVINE: Tell me about coming from Russia, and then making your life here.

MUSNIKOW: Yeah.

LEVINE: What do you think that meant to you, that you started out in Russia?

MUSNIKOW: To me, I had my Manny. If she was still alive, (?).

We were sixty-seven years together, sixty-seven years. I never went from this corner to that corner without her. And nineteen seasons, we used to Pesach, Easter, Jewish Easter, we used to go in Florida, and we used to stay there six, seven. Why?

Because the Pesach, the Jewish, in my work, papering, you got to mix paste with mill, with, you're baking bread, with flour. And this is humus, so I couldn't work up there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MUSNIKOW: You see what I mean? I couldn't work, because all the customers were Jewish. They wouldn't let me in.

So we used to go away. And they have there friends already. We had fun. They used to wait for us. There, you should come there. We had a wonderful time.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about . . .

MUSNIKOW: She was a very nice girl. That's all I had. I never had a different girl. She didn't have a different boy. So there in time, what you're going to have. We didn't, they didn't flirt together till after the wedding, you know. You know, that's really here now, the boy and the girl, one, two, three, eighteen years old, nineteen years old. That's nothing to them. But I, the way we used to, we used to go together, and we used to go, that we used to have the Dneper there. There was a little river. So we used to go in the night.

LEVINE: Walk.

MUSNIKOW: Now I wouldn't go there, because now that's all the black, black people. Now they could kill you and they could rob you for the few dollars that you got. I wouldn't go there. But that time, we didn't have, we weren't afraid. So every night we used to go till

three, four o'clock, in the night time. We used to go.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, because the tape is about to finish, I want to ask you about . . .

MUSNIKOW: Well, ask me. Why not?

LEVINE: I want to ask you about this part of your life? What is it like for you now, in your old age?

MUSNIKOW: This is a wonderful, it's a wonderful life. I'll tell you why. I'll tell you why. I've got two, I have two sons. One is a rich man. He got, he put in Israel, he bought a condominium there. He paid a million dollars. He's, Sammy. He's the oldest son. He is a, he is doing. It's hard to explain what is, he gives jobs to fellows, you know, to somebody, and he takes jobs. He makes a nice living. He is a rich man, my older son. The youngest, he had a wife, and she died a young woman, right away. But now he's got a different girl, and they're very nice, and I'm happy. I'm happy, I don't have to ask not this one and not the other one. I got a few dollars. I got a few dollars. And whatever I need, I got. I don't have to ask them, "Freddy, or Sammy, give me a few

dollars." I got enough, I got enough, my income. The income is bigger than my expenses, so I never, (?) I always got enough. Never. I always got enough. So I'm happy.

LEVINE: Good.

MUSNIKOW: In general, I'm a happy man.

LEVINE: You look like a happy man.

MUSNIKOW: I'm a happy man. Look, I say, if you can, in Yiddish. Well, I'll translate to you. (Yiddish)
"If you can't grow older, you grow younger."

LEVINE: Well, that's a great place to stop. I've been talking with Max Musnikow.

MUSNIKOW: Any time.

LEVINE: It's July 20, 1993. He just turned ninety-eight. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, signing off.