

**EI-436**

**HERMAN (originally GRYNSPAN) GREENE**  
**BIRTH DATE: MAY 15, 1910 (ACTUAL BIRTH YEAR IS 1909)**  
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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**  
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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1998**  
**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: JANET LEVINE**

**POLAND, 1924**  
**AGE 14**

**PORT: LE HAVRE**  
**PASSAGE ON "THE SUFFREN"**  
**RESIDENCES: SKIERNEWICE, POLAND**  
**NYC, UTICA, NY**

LEVINE: It's February 25, 1994, and I'm here with Herman Greene at his home in  
Lauderhill, Florida. Mr. Greene came from Poland in 1924 when he was fourteen  
years old. Mrs. Greene is also here with us, and I want to say I'm happy to be  
here and I'm looking forward to hearing your particular story. Why don't we start  
by you saying your birth date and where in Poland you were born.

GREENE: Okay. I have, the story is that I have two birthdays. (he laughs) Actually, my  
birthday is October 1909. However, but my mother, when we came here, for our,  
to remember dates easier, she gave me May 15, 1910, and my brother July, July  
4th, 1912. Well, I went ahead, all my school records were May 15, 1910, and I

kept those records there, and I went through school and everything else there with that birthday, and that's what I celebrate. Actually I'm six months older than I am. But, however, I just celebrate May 15, 1910. And a town called Skiernewice, S-K-I-E-R-N-E-W-I-C-E. Jewish people would pronounce it Skiernewice. The average person, all the others would say Skiernewice. As a matter of fact, one day I was speaking to a Polish woman here in America, and she says, "Where are you from?" I said, "I was born in Skiernewice." "You mean Skiernewice?" And she happened to be Polish. Uh, that's . . .

LEVINE: Did you live in that town the entire time before you came here?

GREENE: Yes. I went to school there, and I was going to gymnasium, which is equivalent to high school here.

LEVINE: Do you remember the town? Can you describe it?

GREENE: Yes. It was a small, it was a nice population. Uh, most of it was a Jewish community. The Christian community were either serving, or they lived on the farms nearby. But the town itself was occupied mostly, I should say about ninety-five percent, of Jewish population, businesses, services, tailors and, uh, my grandfather happened to be in the tanning business. He would contract government, farmers to buy the hides, then convert the hides into leather, and then he had a contract with the government to make boots for the army.

LEVINE: Oh.

GREENE: So he happened to be a very well-to-do man, and we had all facilities. My grandfather's house was the first one in town to have electricity.

LEVINE: Wow. What was his name?

GREENE: Abba Gayer, G-A-Y-E-R.

LEVINE: And do you remember him?

GREENE: Oh, of course. I was fourteen years old. I'll show you a picture of him.

LEVINE: Wait, can you remember any experiences?

GREENE: Yes.

LEVINE: That tell what kind of a person he was.

GREENE: Well, my grandfather was a typical Hasidic Jew, and so was my grandmother. However, my mother was of the modern generation that did not observe. And my grandfather was never against anything. You do what you want. Now, we would go to movies on Saturday night. My grandfather would leave money on the side there, so we can go to the movies, because he wouldn't handle any money. Another thing I remember that every Friday morning my grandmother would take

two servants that she had in the house, and they had one of these big cellars dug into the ground with the doors opening up there. Inside there were shelves with food for the season. And my grandmother with two servants would stay there Friday morning and dish out to the poor people for the shabbas to have food. They'd each get a certain amount of food, but she would dish that out Friday morning to these people with the two servants there. Now, I went to school, and I . . .

LEVINE: Wait, first tell me your grandmother's name?

GREENE: Chaya Sura Gayer.

LEVINE: Spell it.

GREENE: C-H-A-Y-A, Sura, S-U-R-A, Gayer, G-A-Y-E-R.

LEVINE: Did you have, can you remember anything with you and your grandmother, things that you did?

GREENE: My grandmother was a very good-natured woman. Uh, but they had, she and my grandfather, both very asthmatic. They had asthma in those days. And I remember in their bedroom, in front of each bed there was a square box with sand that they could cough in, because they'd cough into it. I remember going to the sklad lptchna. That's S-K-L-A-D, lptchna, L-P-T-C-H-N-A. That's called a

drugstore. Sklad is a store, lptchna is a phac . . . , uh, pharmacy. Then there was a pharmacy separate that did prescriptions only. The sklad lptchna, the drugstore, would carry cough drops, all the other, everything but compounding of prescriptions. They wouldn't, there was a different thing altogether that was called an opteka, O-P-E, O-P-T-E-K-A. That's was, a pharmacy was separate, a drug store was separate: They were two different things. Uh, personally, we spoke Polish at home, just like you speak English here. I understood Yiddish, but I didn't speak too much of it because my native language was Polish. School, friends, and everything else. I would converse with my grandfather and grandmother some Yiddish words the way the average American child speaks, but mixes in with the Polish. Uh, well, I'll go in on later.

LEVINE: You say (voices garbled) Asthma, and . . .

GREENE: Yes.

LEVINE: Is there anything else about medical, uh, topics that you remember from childhood, the way either . . .

GREENE: No, they were just coughing all the time in there, but they had servants and they had plenty of food and there was no want for anything, where I hear some of these other stories that people talk about, the living conditions. As a matter of fact, we had one cousin, a third generation cousin here, and his wife would say one day to

me here, "Oh, I heard about your grandmother. Your, my husband Martin had to steal bread and potatoes from your grandmother." And I said, "Don't you ever, ever repeat that to anyone or to me, because if my grandmother gave out every Friday morning to total strangers in the town, she would not deny anything to her nephews and nieces. So this is a story that's made up there, don't believe any of it. As a matter of fact, I said, "When your mother-in-law came with the rest of the children to this country, my grandfather advanced money for them to come here in 1920, also in 1920." All right, now where do we want to go now?

LEVINE: How about the house that you lived? Can you describe that?

GREENE: It was a, well, it was a big house. It was a square block in the center with a, uh, water pump, but there were apartments all around, and my grandfather owned that property. We had a small apartment, my mother, my brother and I. My grandfather's apartment was large, because they had the servants sleeping there and everything else. Uh . . .

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

GREENE: My father's name was Abraham Greenspan was, actually it was Grynszpan, G-R-Y-N-S-Z-P-A-N. And, uh, he came from a different city.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

GREENE: Was Pearl, but she called herself Pauline. Uh, my mother, I think, was fifty years ahead of her time.

LEVINE: Why so?

GREENE: Everything about her. She's not kosher, not observant, the Jewish holidays. Uh, when she came to this country in 1920, oh, well, I, let's go back how I hadn't . . .

LEVINE: We'll go chronologically.

GREENE: Okay.

LEVINE: Anything else about the town, going to school?

GREENE: Well, yes. I remember going to school, because I went to this gymnasium, and this was on Saturday. School was six days a week.

LEVINE: Was this a private school?

GREENE: Uh, yes, you paid. And, uh, I think there were only two Jewish boys. I was one of them, and another boy, a fellow by the name of Rem Borenstein[ph], who happens to be right now, if he's still alive, he came in Sydney, Australia, became a dentist there, so I don't know if he's still alive. The last I heard was twenty years ago, and he was living there --through the grapevine. Uh, that was about the time

they had a synagogue, also a, uh, temple, probably it was more of a conservative, but the other was Hasidic. Uh, my grandfather had, they buy pews, and the one, I remember, in the Hasidic place, in the synagogue itself, was right next to the rabbi, to the rabbi of the town. And he had two seats in the big temple, the big schul, that was used on the holy days and stuff like that there. But the women sat upstairs. Uh, what else? Oh, yes. They had the mikvah that Friday (he laughs) we went to.

LEVINE: Did, uh, tell about that.

GREENE: Public baths. It's a public bath that we'd line up there, certain hours for men, certain hours for women. Uh, it would be a large pool inside with hot water. Then there were private bathtubs that the more wealthier people could pay for it, would go into the bathtub. The others would go into this big pool. And, uh, what else about town?

LEVINE: Anything that you observed, any special holidays or occasions that you remember?

GREENE: Uh, I remember Passovers, yes. There was one thing I remember distinctly, that my grandmother had cooked up so many dozens of hardboiled eggs for the Seder, and my brother, being mischievous (he laughs), he and two other boys ate a half a dozen of eggs. (Laughing) We had to start cooking all over again, boiling up

more eggs for the Seder. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What was your brother's name?

GREENE: Uh, in Poland or here? His name here was Sydney, S-Y-D-N-E-Y. And . . .

LEVINE: Younger or older?

GREENE: Younger, two-and-a-half years younger. He passed away in 1987. He had, uh, Parkinson's. Uh, and he, I changed, I dropped my name to Greene when I was going to pharmacy school, and I was working in a Christian neighborhood in Yonkers, on South Broadway and Lawrence Street, and most of the people coming in there were Gentiles, and I would never be called Greenspan. It was Greenwald, Greenstein, Greenberg, everything but Greenspan. So I said one day the heck with it, I cut it short to Green, put an E on there, I graduated out of that school, got married under that name and, uh, this is the way it is. But my brother's children, my brother never did, and he has one son, one daughter. As a matter of fact, the son is an engineer, and the daughter got her Ph.D. in music. And, uh, and she's at Cornell University. And, as a matter of fact, I have a whole article in the paper about her. She was here this last weekend. It was her birthday. So she and her husband were here, and their ten, eleven-year-old daughter.

LEVINE: Uh, so, uh, let's see. Your father came . . .

GREENE: Here in 19 . . .

LEVINE: Over first.

GREENE: 1912.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh, and how was it that he came? Do you remember the situation?

GREENE: Yes, yes. My father was a head bookkeeper for one of these large forests where they would sell the trees and the woods. Well, he wasn't happy with it. He wanted to go into business for himself. So my grandfather gave him money, and he went in business for himself. In the same town, instead of going for business and trying to get customers, he was underselling the other man that he worked for, and went into bankruptcy. Now, in European countries at that time, if you went into bankruptcy, whatever you have, an apartment, a house, furniture, everything is attached. You cannot sell anything. It becomes a part of the, to satisfy the bankruptcy. So my grandfather had meanwhile signed over things to my mother in her name instead of his, and said, "You might as well leave the country." So he went to America. Otherwise he would have had to go to jail for bankruptcy, in those days. That's how he came to this country.

LEVINE: Did you ever, you, did you know your grandparents on your father's side?

GREENE: We went once to visit him, my brother and I, during the summertime in the school. The school would give us certificates to ride on trains at half price. And we were dressed in short pants and different, I mean, we weren't payeses, nothing, anything. So we went to this town, and we went to see our grandparents. When we walked in, we told them who we were, and we got the coldest reception. The next day I said to my brother, "Let's leave." And we did. And that's it.

Uh, then I can, I think I continue now, after the war, when my mother got a letter from her brother that my father was going to Europe to pick us up.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you remember anything about the First World War, any, did you have any personal experiences related to it?

GREENE: Nothing. We went to school, we had food, we had everything. We had no, we weren't for the want of anything.

LEVINE: And you didn't see anything around you?

GREENE: We saw the soldiers there, because they had barracks there in town outside, on the outskirts of town, where these, uh, soldiers would come, and I remember some of the Jewish faith would come Saturdays to the synagogue in their uniforms and all, and on holidays they would go to people in town. Saturday meals, and holiday

meals and stuff like that. Uh, then the war is over, my mother gets this letter that he's coming for us. That was in 1918, 1919, 1920, no Abraham. So my mother went to, said to my grandfather, "I'm going to America and look for him." She went to the, uh, American consulate in Warsaw and got the passport for herself and my brother and I. So when she came back and told that to my grandfather, he says, "No way are you going to take the children with you. Leave the children here, and you go and look for him." She came here, and she started looking for him in the HIAS and all these other organizations. (Dr. Levine sneezes.)

LEVINE: Excuse me.

GREENE: Bless you.

LEVINE: So did she leave you there?

GREENE: She left us in Poland with our grandfather, and we could just continue going to school, and we were living with my grandfather and grandmother. We would get letters from my mother, pictures and stuff like that.

LEVINE: What did your mother tell you about America? Do you remember anything in the letters?

GREENE: Uh, well, she would, being that we started, she had never worked in her life, but she became, learned the millinery business. And little by little she became a

designer, and she worked with Scaparelli, uh, later on after we came here. So she went to Poland to, meanwhile she went to Poland to pick my brother and I up.

LEVINE: Did she find your father?

GREENE: Oh, yes, I'm sorry. It took her until 1924, from 1920 to '24, located him in Los Angeles, California, and he was living with a woman there. So he wanted to leave the woman and come to my mother. She said, "I don't want any part of you, I want a divorce." And that's it. So she got a divorce, and then instead of sending for my brother and I, she said to herself she might as well go to Poland, see her mother and father, and bring us back with her. She went to the American consulate in Warsaw, gave him the passport that she had with the original 1920, and they went ahead and stamped it, and we left Poland.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving?

GREENE: Yes, definitely. I was fourteen years old.

LEVINE: How did you feel?

GREENE: Well, I would miss my friends and school. It was an entirely different life that we were expecting. I mean, so, uh, we went to, we went through Germany, then we went to France, and I remember we got on the ship in France.

LEVINE: Now, had you been out of your town, I mean . . .

GREENE: Previous?

LEVINE: You must have taken a train. Yeah.

GREENE: Yeah, we took a train.

LEVINE: But previous . . .

GREENE: I would take trains at different, summertime vacations we'd go to different places to visit.

LEVINE: I see. So this wasn't completely new.

GREENE: No. It wasn't.

LEVINE: Traveling by train.

GREENE: No, definitely not. It wasn't new. It was, uh, just a longer distance to go to. (he laughs) And an entirely different life. As a matter of fact, my mother did, she met a man who was from England, and for two weeks she started, she hired this man to give us some English lessons.

LEVINE: Where were you then?

GREENE: In Poland, in Warsaw, in Skiernewice. As a matter of fact, certain words, people would say, "You don't speak like a New Yorker." Because I was brought up a New Yorker, I was fourteen years old, but I recall, uh, anyone, when we started school here, and I'd walk in the street, I had my little booklet, a little pad, and I'd write the names down I'd see on signs and everything. I had a cousin nearby living a few blocks away, and I would go and say, "Hi, what are these words?" And he would tell me. And I'll never forget, my first English spelling test I had, in the seventh grade. I was the only one that had a hundred percent, and I didn't know what the words meant. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Can you remember words that your tutor in Poland . . .

GREENE: England?

LEVINE: Yeah, the English guy who taught you?

GREENE: Uh, well, there were the English accent. I got, we got to know the words, but you, the e is silent "sometime". Uh, but this was a difficult time I had when I came here. When I would play with the boys in the street and I'd leave, I'd say, "I'll see you summertime." They said, "What do you mean in summertime? This is summertime?" I'd say, "S-O-M-E-T-I-M-E." "Oh, you mean sometime." (they laugh) Because I would pronounce the silent letters. But I would tell everyone, when they'd speak to me, I'd say, "Please, don't speak to me any language but

English. I want to learn English. So if you want to converse with me, if you can, speak to me and slowly explain the words to me." And this is. . . but one day I came home from school, and I was very annoyed. My mother says, "What's the trouble?" I said, "The kids in school are teasing me. 'You came from Europe, you don't speak Yiddish?'" I said to one of them, I said, "How many, you and many others," I said, "How many of you speak Yiddish?" "We speak certain words." I said, "Well, the same thing with me." But this is the way I was annoyed. I said, "I'm going to show these kids up. I want to learn Yiddish. I want to learn to speak it, read it and write it." So I went to a school, to a Workman's Circle school where they'd teach you Yiddish, not Hebrew, Yiddish. Explained all the Jewish history and everything else, but all in Yiddish. So I read, write and speak Yiddish, and not a Polish Yiddish, a Russian Yiddish. As a matter of fact, when I got married and my in-laws were living in Florida, her brother was an attorney the other (laughing) was in plumbing contracting, I was the official correspondent because they write in Yiddish.

LEVINE: Oh. So how long did you study at that Workman's Circle?

GREENE: Uh, for about a year, yes. I went to school three, four times a week. It was very . . .

LEVINE: Well, let's, um, what port did you leave from?

GREENE: Le Havre, France.

LEVINE: And, and the ship?

GREENE: Was, uh, oh, wait a minute. I knew it, Suffern, S-U-F-F-E-R-N, SS Suffern. It was a French line. You see, my mother said, when we were coming, after, the first time I saw bananas was in Berlin, Germany. We stopped off there. And then when it came to eating vegetables, she said, "You must learn to eat this, because you'll be eating vegetables in America."

LEVINE: You weren't used to eating vegetables?

GREENE: We occasionally had a tomato called a pommodore. Uh, and, uh, oranges that came from different parts of the world, not from Poland. So, and that would never, you'd never get a whole orange. You'd get slices, sliced up on a platter.

LEVINE: Can you remember any foods that you did have, any dishes that . . .

GREENE: In Poland?

LEVINE: Yeah, in Poland.

GREENE: Oh, the typical Jewish dishes, Jewish cooking. The chicken, and the, uh, fish, gefilte fish. Uh, I remember once (he laughs) when my mother was there, and she

came to pick us up, and it was Passover, and we went to some Christian's house that she, one of her girlfriends, years back, and I remember eating a piece of ham for the first time, on Passover. (he laughs) But I would never dare tell that to my grandfather. As a matter of fact, my mother never kept a kosher home here. I was bar mitzvahed in Poland. My grandfather, well, you just go up to the, you read a part of the Torah, and that's it. It's not like the big thing that it's made in America. But my brother was two-and-a-half years younger than I was, never bar mitzvahed when we came here, because my mother didn't have a kosher home.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Suffern?

GREENE: Yes. The nice part about that, my mother wanted us to have the pleasure of a long ride on a boat. So this she got tickets, on this boat that catered to American tourists who didn't want to go first class, third class. It was one class only, so everyone was dressed nicely, served nicely and beautifully, but it was actually a pleasure boat that we got so many Americans on there who were returning back to the States. As a matter of fact, two boys that I met many years later in school, in high school, they says, "Hey, we came on the same boat with you when you came to America."

LEVINE: So you . . .

GREENE: What happened to them . . .

LEVINE: I'm sorry.

GREENE: Go ahead.

LEVINE: Were you able to speak a little bit on the boat, English?

GREENE: A little bit, not too, words enough to be understood with motions and stuff like that. So when we got to, when we got to the States, we got to New York, they started speaking, the inspectors at the, uh . . .

LEVINE: Ellis Island.

GREENE: Not Ellis Island. On the boat, at the boat, started speaking to my brother and I, English. And we spoke very little. They said, "Well, you have four years in the country, how did you speak very little?" I said, "We're not here four years. This is our first trip." But according to the passport, we were coming back here with my mother. So they said, "Well, they'll have to hold my brother and I until the papers are straightened out, and they sent us to Ellis Island." So my mother said, "If you're taking the children, I'm going with them. You're not going to take the children alone to Ellis Island." So my mother with us. Meanwhile she got in touch with some relatives who were connected with the Jewish newspaper, The Forward, he was a writer, Leon Gottlieb, and he had P.C. Vladik[ph], who was a (?) in the socialist party in those days, they went to Washington, DC and they

explained that we, my brother and I were on a quota in 1920 when my mother came. However, we didn't come on that, so no one came in our place, so actually we were entitled to come in. So it took four days to straighten this out, and this Leon Gottlieb from The Forward came and picked us up at Ellis Island and took us up to his apartment in the Bronx.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

GREENE: I remember the, keeping the men separate, the women separate, and I got to learn the word, "Mangia, **mangia, everybody's got to eat!**" (he laughs) On the line. And, uh, as a matter of fact, when we were at Ellis Island three years ago, the woman asked everyone to raise their hands who was here, and I raised my hand, along with others, and I was the first one to call on. She said, "What do you recall?" So I told her. I said it was sixty-seven years ago, but I remember these things. And she said, "What else do you remember?" I said, "I remember after four days we left and nobody gave us a bill. We were weren't charged anything!" (he laughs) They got such a kick out of it, the audience that was there, and the woman who was conducting it.

LEVINE: Was it clean? Were the accommodations all right?

GREENE: Oh, yes, the accommodations were all right, they were clean. Uh, you know, it's, it's really difficult to recall. I recall one thing, that many years when I was going

to pharmacy school, and I meet a black man, and he said to me, "You look familiar to me." I said, "I beg your pardon?" And he says, "Where'd you live before?" I said, "I lived here in town here." I said, "What kind of work did you do?" He said, "I was an inspector at Ellis Island, and I remember your face."

LEVINE: So there were black inspectors at Ellis Island?

GREENE: Yes.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GREENE: Not many. Whether he was an inspector or he was an orderly there -- that I don't recall exactly. I know he told me that he worked at Ellis Island. I presume he was an inspector. Maybe he was an orderly. Maybe he was just a worker.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you did for those four days when you were there?

GREENE: Nothing very much. There was nothing, nothing to do. Because we were waiting impatiently to hear what's going on. (he laughs) Because some were being returned back to Europe.

LEVINE: But you were with your mother?

GREENE: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I mean, we were in separate parts, with the women in one place, but we would eat our breakfast, lunch and dinner, and we'd spend the day, during the day. But that's the history of that. Then it took me from 1924 to 1931 to do all public school, four years (laughing) of high school, three years of pharmacy school. (he laughs) All in ten years.

LEVINE: Tell me, uh, can you make any comparisons between the pharmacy in this country and anything you remember about it . . .

GREENE: Oh, well, there was, the pharmacy in Poland was strictly cut and dry. You walked in there, you were respected. You were speaking to a pharmacist. You had respect. Uh, you sat and waited until your prescription was ready. It was, I mean, it was professional thing, believe me. It wasn't commercialized then. Well, it became much more commercialized (he laughs ) after I got into it so many years later. I mean, when I got my own pharmacy, it was entirely different.

LEVINE: It was more like a physician almost.

GREENE: Yeah, yes. You're, definitely. As a matter of fact, you didn't have many . . . I don't think there was much compensation going on between the pharmacist and the patients. Usually the patient was too sick to go, too ill, and someone would go to get the prescription, so it was never much conversation.

LEVINE: Was there any difference in what the prescriptions would be, uh . . .

GREENE: If they were compounded? Mostly in those days I imagine they were compounded, because it was fifty-eight years ago. In my time even most of the compounding here. As a matter of fact, even after I retired and I came down to Florida and I worked here two days a week, in 1971, on Mondays and Saturdays I worked nine to three, six hours a day. And we came to, any compounds that these dermatologists or others would write, they'd bring it into the pharmacy, they'd say, "Well, you have to leave it here," because I was the one to do the compounding, because these kids getting out of school now, to them it's taking it off the shelf, count it, blum, and now everything's computerized. You've got the numbers there, the girls give you, do the computing, and they're having the refills, but there aren't any refills, you have to call the doctor and stuff, and some time ago it was different than that.

LEVINE: Do you remember any folk, like homeopathic or folk, uh . . . ?

GREENE: Uh, here in this country, but not in Poland, I don't remember. That I don't remember.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

GREENE: Here they had the homeopathic medicine, Humphrey's and all --they used to

be kept in cabinets. They were all numbers, number 77, 84, all the, uh, in this country.

LEVINE: So when you first got to this country, um, and you were able to leave Ellis Island, do you remember your first, uh, time, what you . . .

GREENE: Yes, I remember, yes. We went up to this cousin's house up in the Bronx, on Southern Boulevard near the Bronx parks, and we had our shorts. Here, you call them here Bermuda shorts. It was the summertime. But the shirts itself were long-sleeved shirts and open collar, and the shorts. And we went down to buy clothes with my mother, down to the east side. And they started pulling us from all sides, and my mother says, "Leave those boys alone. They're not greenhorns. Just leave them alone. Don't pull them into the stores." (he laughs)

LEVINE: They would literally pull you?

GREENE: Oh, yeah, literally pull all these, foreigners, oh, God. They'd grab a hold of you; they'd put them on. Jacket wouldn't fit; somebody back there would hold the jacket back to make a perfect fit. (he laughs) My mother was too modern for that, too Americanized.

LEVINE: So then you got American clothes.

GREENE: Oh, yes. I remember, also knickers. I remember I was going to high school, I got

my first pair of long pants (chuckles).

LEVINE: And your mother was now making hats, designing hats.

GREENE: After she went and opened up a millinery store of her own.

LEVINE: Where was that?

GREENE: 116th Street, it was in New York City between Lenox and Fifth Avenue, on both sides of the streets were all, ninety percent of the millinery stores. People used to come from all over. As a matter of fact, my mother had worked up a beautiful trade. She had a three-room apartment in back of the store, and they had a machine in there, a sewing machine, to sew hats, all these different, six section crowns, eight, velour hats. She was starting, getting some of the wealthy Jewish women come there and order three, four hats at a time, the velour hats. And I remember going downtown with her one day to the wholesale houses to get the bodies, which they had to be blocked and all.

LEVINE: So how did your mother change? How can you describe the difference in your mother once she became a businesswoman and a professional?

GREENE: Well, she worked hard. Uh, I would not deny anything to my brother and I. She met a man from this town in Poland that admired her when she was a youngster, a teenager, and he never got married. And then he somehow talked my mother into

marrying him, because there were two class of people there, his family were of the poorer class, and they don't mix with the rich class. That was where my mother came from, my grandfather and grandmother. So there was yikhes. You know what that word is? It's honoring. There are different classes. I won't say the American society people and the lower person, not as far as education was concerned, but as far as their upbringing and everything else about them, their mannerisms. So you would never dare to approach them. But here it was a different story altogether. So they got married, and in 1930 my mother gave birth to a girl, when I was twenty years old. And when my wife and I got married in 1934, she was our flower girl.

LEVINE: What was your mother's second husband's name?

GREENE: Uh, actually it was her third husband. Reemer, R-DOUBLE E-M-E-R. And it wasn't, maybe my brother and I might have caused some of it there, because my mother would not deny my brother and I anything, and he resented so many things. I remember one day I was working after school and I wanted to get a nice suit, so I asked him to come with me. He went with me, and I picked out a suit, and he says, "That's too an expensive suit for a boy your age to buy." I said, "Well, I'm paying for it and I would like it." He says, "Well, buy it then, but don't talk to me." So we didn't. . . good relationship. And, uh, then he passed away, and my brother and I supported my mother. She passed away at the age of ninety-

three. And we had everything for her, whatever she needed, she had. She had her own apartment in the same building where my brother lived in the Bronx. Uh, after my two boys, my oldest son didn't want any part of pharmacy. He wants to study medicine. Fine. Then my other son was eight-and-a-half years younger, so I wasn't going to wait until he told me he doesn't want the pharmacy. So I sold the store, and, uh, I get, a friend of mine who had a drugstore at 46th Street and Sixth Avenue, he was very ill, and his wife calls me up, she says, "Can you come in and give Mac a hand?" He had two partners, two silent partners who --it was an old Liggett's store that was converted to individual owner, and all the pressure was on him seven days a week, all hours. I said I'll go in and help him, so I let him go away for a couple of weeks and I worked. After he came back, he made it tempting for me to stay with him. But then it got to be so, meanwhile our older son gets accepted in medical school in Syracuse after he graduated Bronx High School of Science. No, he went to Union College in Schenectady, I'm sorry. Then he was accepted to medical school. I happened to call an employment agency, a pharmacy employment agency in New York when I was working in this drug store on 46th Street, Hadley Pharmacy. And I spoke to the man, Jack Berger [ph]. I says, "I need a relief man." He says, "Herman Greene, why the hell don't you get out of New York City?" I said, "Why?" He says, "There's a chain of drugstores out of Rochester, New York that I'm very friendly with, and you could have a beautiful life upstate." I said, "Come on, I've never been away from New

York City since I'm here." Well, when our son was accepted in medical school in Syracuse, I get a call from this Jack Berger, he says, "Mazeltov, congratulations, I hear your son was accepted. How would you like to work in Syracuse?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" He says, "How would you like to work for this chain of drugstores in Syracuse?" I said, "Let me speak to my wife." I came home, I said, "Then Allen's been away four years in Schenectady, now he's going to Syracuse to medical school, how would you like, I was offered the job." She says, "Well, let's think about it." So I call back this Jack, and I said, "Jack, I would like to speak to these people first." Uh, we drove, we had a wedding in New York, and my son came in for the wedding. Her cousin got married, and drove him back to Schenectady. I had called before, and I, he made the appointment with the executive vice president of the small chain of drugstores in Rochester, New York, where the home office was, for a certain day, on a Tuesday, to go over there to be interviewed and speak to them. So we drove Allen back to Schenectady, to Union College, and I didn't know how, I'd never been above Schenectady, so I just knew where it was, where Rochester was. So we made the appointment for Tuesday morning. So Sunday we drove him, and Monday I drove up to Rochester, and we get into Rochester, we check in the hotel, and then the next morning I go for this interview. And the secretary says, "Yes, Mr. Fineglass." "My name is Greene." "Oh, yes, Mr. Fineglass is waiting for you." She calls him on the intercom. He comes out and invites me inside. He said, "When'd you get here?" I said, "We

got here yesterday." He says, "Well, what do you mean, we?" I said, "Well, my wife is with me. We brought my son back to Schenectady, to Union College." And he said, "So where she is?" I said, "At the hotel." So he says, he calls the secretary, "Call the hotel and ask Mrs. Greene, I want to speak to her." So I called and she wasn't there. So I says maybe she's out shopping there in the hotel. Well, "Leave a message for her that she's not to have lunch, that we're coming down there and we're having lunch at the hotel together." So we drive down in this big, beautiful limo into the hotel, we go in the dining room, and she's there, and in the small towns, introduce you to the president of the bank and all these other executives. Meanwhile he had shown me around the whole warehouse and everything else there, and he says, he tries to sell, tell my wife about it. He says, "I'm trying to sell him, her a bill of goods," she says, "Whatever he decides, it'll do." Well, by that time he got to know each other, first name and everything else. I said, "Jack," I said, "let me go to New York and think it over." I said, "You don't know too much about me." He said, "Are you kidding? I got a list this long, from the time you came here from Poland. We don't offer executive jobs just to anybody that we don't know about. So we know everything about you. Uh, but you think it over." We went back to New York, and I spoke to the man, this fellow Mac Hecht[ph], that I was helping out. I said, "Mac, I got a proposition. The supervisor for this chain of drugstores in upstate New York." He said, "Come on, stay here. You want to become a partner here? Become a partner

here. Buy out one of my partners here, the silent partners that I have." I said, "No, no." I called up Rochester, and I said, spoke to this Jack Fineglass, I said, "Jack, I would like to try a three month period for myself. I want you to pay all my expenses while I'm up there. I don't want burden Cheryl. I want to stay in a hotel for the three months. Weekends I want to go into New York." So I my nice thruway plate in those days, 1956, so I can go back and forth on the thruway. And I said, "I'll try it." He says, "Fine, when you want to come?" "Oh," I said, "at least some time in July." So, all right, let him know. And I go up there. And the second day I was there in Syracuse, he didn't send me into Utica, he sent me into Syracuse, and then into Rochester, because they had trouble, they brought a man in from out of town, from Chicago, as the supervisor. The other pharmacists in town resented it, why shouldn't they get a promotion. So, they said, they will do the same thing. They wanted to prevent that with me by working in Syracuse. Then eventually when I go into Utica, I'll just be a transfer from Syracuse to Utica, there won't be any of that, and that's just what happened. But I got to love it so much, and my son came up. Meanwhile I had taken an apartment, because my son, the medical school at that time didn't have dorms for the students in 1956. So I took an apartment near the school so we wouldn't need two cars. And, uh, so the relationship was very nice, and then I went into Utica, and it was sixteen years, and a beautiful relationship. They came to my son's wedding, and when my son married, the doctor. And, uh, we've been very happy, not, not yet. We've

been very happy and, uh, in 1971, 1968 they went ahead and sold out to the Rite Aid Corporation. The Rite Aid Corporation bought this chain of forty-eight stores and they incorporated with them. It became, it was an entirely different operation. It wasn't a personal thing.

LEVINE: And that's when you left?

GREENE: That's when I said to them, I said, "I'm sorry, I'm leaving, give me my pension, let me get the hell out of here." "What do you mean? You're, you're only going to be seventy years old . . ." Uh, sixty, it was 1970, "You'll be sixty years old." I said, "As far as I'm concerned, the pension that you have, I'm eligible at fifty-five. I want to get out. You have been to my son's wedding, I hope to be at my other son's wedding, which is eight-and-a-half years later, I'm not going to get the pressure being pulled on me by Rite Aid, I don't want any part of it." So this is what happened, I said I want you to give me my bonus, my year's vacation, unemployment, get out of here. They give me everything but the bonus. The bonus they wouldn't.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, um, your wife's name, and how you met her.

GREENE: Yes. Uh, her name was Edna Jaffe, J-A-F-F-E. When I worked in this pharmacy in New York, there was a young couple, Sylvia and Raymond Weyl, W-E-Y-L. Sylvia's mother was an assistant buyer at Gimbel's, and Edna's aunt was the

buyer. I would go out with Sylvia and Ray on dates, and every time she would tell her mother, or her Aunt Stella would be there, would say Herman, Herman. She says, "Who is this Herman?" "Well, this is one of the, he's a pharmacist, he's working at this drug store, and when he has a date we go out together." "Well, I have a niece I'd like him to meet." (he laughs) So Sylvia calls up and she says, "Herman, I've got a blind date for you." I said, "What the hell are you talking? What do you mean, blind dates?" I didn't know any blind dates. (?) So where is it? At that time they had moved away from this drugstore where they, Washington Heights, and moved down to 83rd Street on the west side, and I went down there to meet her. I met her there, we spent a very pleasant evening, I said, "Let me take you home." So she said, "Fine." This is 83rd Street, she says, "79th Street." So we go to 79th Street, Clifton Hotel is it? I don't remember what hotel it was, the residential hotel, they restore it later. She says, I said, "Give me your phone number." She gives me a Mott Haven telephone number. I said, "That's the Bronx." She says, "Yeah, that's where I live. My aunt, I'm supposed to meet tomorrow. So instead of going to the Bronx and coming back again, I'm staying overnight at my aunt's." So I dropped her off there. That was on a Saturday. Tuesday my fraternity had some kind of an affair, and I had made a date with a gal, and she was calling me up, she was having difficulty with her dress and everything else, I said, "Forget about it." I call her up, and she says, "Wait a minute. I have a date for Tuesday night." I said, "Break it. I'll pick you up at

eight o'clock, at seven o'clock, I'll pick you up at seven o'clock." And I hang up. Seven o'clock I go there pick her up. Then I heard later on as we were driving away (laughing), her date came. So her mother says, "She had to go to Brooklyn," that her aunt or somebody got sick. (he laughs) And then the following Saturday something else happened. Oh, yes, another friend of mine whose sister was married to a motion picture producer in Hollywood, and they came, they were staying at the, uh, Essex House. So this fellow, Dave Finger, was going out with this Mildred, and her sister went away, she gave him the apartment to use. So she says, "Come, bring your date down here." So I call her, "Come on, I've got a date for you." (he laughs) So we went there, and that's just how it started.

LEVINE: And you have two children?

GREENE: We have two sons. Our older son is fifty-eight now, he's a radiologist in Boston, retired last year. He has three children, two daughters and a son.

LEVINE: What's your son's name?

GREENE: My son's name is Allen Greene. As a matter of fact, this is, Allen said to me one day, "Dad, did you have to change Greenspan to Greene? Look what happened to Allen Greenspan in Washington, DC." I said, "I'm very happen with Allen Greene the radiologist (laughing)." He graduated medical school with honors.

He did his residency at the Peter Van Brigham in Boston. When he got through with that he had a six-month teaching fellowship at Harvard Medical School in radiology. Then he went into the service. He was stationed in San Antonio, Texas, for two years, doing nothing but diagnostic radiology for the two years he was there. We went, as a matter of fact, his third child, Debbie, was born in 1966 while he was in the service in San Antonio.

LEVINE: And how about your other son?

GREENE: Our other son, eight-and-a-half years' difference, went up to, when we moved upstate to Utica, he became very active in boy scouts and everything else there, graduated high school and went on to Buffalo University as a pre-law student. After . . .

LEVINE: And his name?

GREENE: His name is Frederick, Frederick Greene. After three years pre-law, he was given; he was accepted in law school. He went to law school for two years, met a girl from Yonkers, New York, up in Buffalo, and decided they wanted to get married. So they got married in 1966, 1966. Yes, because Bobby couldn't come down from San Antonio for the wedding. My younger son was his best man for his brother when he got married in 19 . . . '59? Yeah, '59. So Allen flew in from San Antonio to be his best man for his wedding. They come back from their

honeymoon, decided he didn't want, he decided he didn't want law. So he was offered, he went on for his master's, and then he got a scholarship for his Ph.D.

LEVINE: And what's his field?

GREENE: Business administration and labor relations, and that's what he is at Manhattan College. They have one daughter, who's gone to Riverdale Country School from preschool to graduation, went into Brandeis, graduated last year magna cum laud from Brandeis.

LEVINE: We have just a few minutes left.

GREENE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh, tell me, what impact do you think, starting out in Poland and coming here in your teens, how do you think that affected you?

GREENE: Me it didn't affect at all, because the things that we had, that I, my brother had, were the same things we will have here. As far as school is concerned, as far as living is concerned, food and everything else here. We did not have, and my mother started making, was working as a milliner, as a designer, at several jobs, even on Saturdays when the factory would close, she'd go on Saturdays and do samples for, the little millinery manufacturer could not afford to have a full time designer, so she'd go on Saturday and make samples to these. There was always

bread to eat. We weren't hungry.

LEVINE: Do you feel that there's any sides to you or aspects of you, your personality, that are Polish, or . . .

GREENE: No, no.

LEVINE: Customs that you keep from . . .

GREENE: I, nothing, no. As a matter of fact . . . (he coughs) My mother, who did not have, observe the Jewish religion, and even the millinery store that she had would close on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but we'd never go to temple, we'd never go to schul, not until I met this gal did I become a Jew and become active in temples. And when my mother wanted a kosher meal, she'd come to my house because Edna wanted her mother and father to come, too, so we'd have two sets of dishes. As a matter of fact, one day I came home from the drugstore, I was working in Yonkers, and I see a glass plate. I said, "What's this?" She says, "You bring a sandwich up there, please use the glass plate, because you get the milkhik and fleishik mixed up. This was you use the glass plates." So her mother and father could . . . My brother married a gal whose father was also very orthodox, so they had a kosher home. So when we wanted bacon and eggs, we'd go to my mother, when my mother wanted a kosher meal (laughs) she'd come to either my house or my brother's house.

LEVINE: How about this phase of your life, your retirement phase?

GREENE: I, I worked part-time until two years ago. This pharmacy closed up after twenty-one years. Uh, we became very active in temple here. I'm on the Board of Trustees. My wife is in the sisterhood board. Uh, our life circles around children, grandchildren. We have three beautiful grandchildren, the Boston bunch, from the radiologist, his oldest. The only thing we have to complain about is that none of them are married (laughs), from twenty-one to thirty-one. And my wife wants great . . ., she wants to be a gigi, a great-grandma. Uh, the oldest one from the Boston is a lawyer in Washington, DC, with the government, Judy Beth. Her brother graduated Syracuse, and he is in California getting his masters in music. The third one, Debbie, graduated Boston College, and she wanted the stage. So she went to New York, and went in the Circle in the Square Theater for one year, and they liked her so much she stayed on another year. Uh, it's a difficult situation to get into. She has participated in several, as a matter of fact, she just got through with one month of Shakespeare acting.

LEVINE: Well, we have about one minute.

GREENE: Okay.

LEVINE: Tell me what you feel most satisfied or proud of in your life.

GREENE: Well, the accomplishment. I met the most wonderful girl in the world. She also came before us on the water, from Brooklyn. (he laughs) And she gave me a beautiful life. As a matter of fact, we are about to celebrate our sixtieth anniversary in May of this year with a lovely family, lovely children. And, as a matter of fact, on my wife's eightieth birthday, I wrote to the President of the United States to thank him, through him, for the opportunities that were given to me when I came to this country.

LEVINE: That's a perfect place to stop. I want to thank you very much. I've been talking with Herman Greene. I'm here in Florida in his home in Lauderhill, and it's February 25, 1994, and this is Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service. Thank you.

GREENE: Thank you so much. This has been wonderful. You know, this, uh . . . (end of recording)

END OF INTERVIEW