

EI-448
MINNIE NEIDIG EDELMAN
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

POLAND, 1920
AGE 10

SHIP: "THE SUSQUEHANNA"
PORT: DANZIG
RESIDENCES
BELARUS: PINSK
POLAND:
US: JERSEY CITY, NJ; HALLANDALE, FL

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today with Minnie Edelman, who came from Poland in 1920 when she was ten years old. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I want to start at the beginning. Could you give me your birth date?

EDELMAN: March 2, 1910.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

EDELMAN: In Pinsk.

LEVINE: And did you live in Pinsk up until the time you left for America?

EDELMAN: Not, uh, the entire time. During the, uh, First World War we, we were, uh, I don't know how many, it's two-and-a-half or three years in Poland. Because my father was here, and he -- he lost a lot of money by trying to send money to us, but we never received it because of the war. So we got so bad that my mother (we were five children, yeah, five children) and, uh, that she had to register to -- see, what happened, that people that owned homes weren't, didn't have to leave Pinsk, because it was the battleground. But people that rented had to get out within twenty-four hours. They - the Germans, it was -- the Germans took it. They were very nice. And they sent it deep into Poland where the war wasn't, uh, so bad or whatever it was.

LEVINE: Well, let's . . .

EDELMAN: So my mother, uh, registered that she would like to go, because she had nothing to fear.

LEVINE: I see.

EDELMAN: We were small children.

LEVINE: Well, um, why don't we, why don't you tell me your mother's name.

EDELMAN: Khasha.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

EDELMAN: Well, here we put the, it's C-H-A-S-H-A, Chasha.

LEVINE: Chasha. And her maiden name?

EDELMAN: Schlackman.

LEVINE: S-C-H . . .

EDELMAN: S-C-H-L-A-C-K, or just K, M-A-N.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's name?

EDELMAN: My father's name is Jacob Neidig.

LEVINE: And, um, did you have grandparents in Pinsk?

EDELMAN: I had, that I know of, just my grandmother. She lived with us.

LEVINE: That was your mother's mother, or your father's?

EDELMAN: No, my father's mother.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about her?

EDELMAN: Well, she was quite, she lived with us. She lived with, my mother - my mother kept her.

LEVINE: Can you remember what she was like and any experiences you had with her?

EDELMAN: No, no experience. My mother was wonderful to her. If my mother bought herself an apron, she bought her mother-in-law an apron. And, uh, she had a wonderful life with us until the war.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

EDELMAN: And that's all I remember about her.

LEVINE: How was she to you, your grandmother?

EDELMAN: Wonderful.

LEVINE: Yeah? And how about your mother? What kind of a person was she?

EDELMAN: Oh, she was a doll. She was a wonderful person. But her old age wasn't so good. She was senile.

LEVINE: I see. How about your father? What was he like when you were a little girl?

EDELMAN: I don't remember my, I didn't know my . . .

LEVINE: Because he had left.

EDELMAN: I didn't know what father meant, because my father left when we were so small, and with the idea of coming back within a year, because the, uh, the ruble was double here. I was going to say if he made a hundred and fifty rubles, a hundred and fifty dollars, it's three hundred rubles, and that was a lot those years. So that's the reason that he went to America, only for one year, to make a few dollars and come back.

LEVINE: And what year did he leave? Do you remember?

EDELMAN: 1912, I think. I don't know.

LEVINE: So you were about two years old when he, when he came over?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, um, so then, uh, did your mother and father, uh, write to each other?

EDELMAN: Oh, yes, definitely. We used to get mail until the war.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, um, what do you remember about the house you lived in in Pinsk?

EDELMAN: I can't -- don't remember too much. It was a beautiful house. We had, uh, two tenants, and our - and our residence. That's too mu--. And I don't even remember . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember when you walked in what you saw?

EDELMAN: Very slight.

LEVINE: Do you remember the kitchen?

EDELMAN: No. Isn't that funny? I don't remember. Too, in the -- only I remember, I think, the living room, because we had the, uh, plants, they were almost to the ceiling, the rubber plants, you know, they call them. And my mother used to keep them so, so that I remember. But everything, the other things I don't, to tell you the truth.

LEVINE: Now, you owned the house, your family?

EDELMAN: My mother owned the house, that's right.

LEVINE: And . . .

EDELMAN: And the tenants, we had Russian and Polish tenants. They left when the war broke out. So the Germans . . .

LEVINE: Did they come to America?

EDELMAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Did they come to America?

EDELMAN: Who?

LEVINE: The Polish tenants?

EDELMAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

EDELMAN: They went back to their, uh, to Poland. Because . . .

LEVINE: Why did they leave, then?

EDELMAN: I wouldn't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EDELMAN: They left, they, I think they left because Russia was at a war, and they couldn't, I really don't know. I wouldn't even . . .

LEVINE: Yeah. What do you remember about the war that happened in your town?

EDELMAN: In my town? I, well, I know we had to get out of the house, deeper into the town, because see, we lived - I - the - I -- this is only from my mother that told us. We lived near the, uh, railroad station, you know, and that's where the troops, I suppose, came in. It was very dangerous. So we had to leave the house. It got to a point where my mother left the -- closed up the house, and I don't know who took us in. I suppose some relatives, deeper in there.

LEVINE: Now, you had, uh, you had sisters and one brother?

EDELMAN: I had -I have an older, I had two brothers at that time, an older brother, and then a younger brother. And after the younger brother, my sister, she was the older one. Then I came, and the younger one was Betty -- Basha.

LEVINE: And what was the older sister's name?

EDELMAN: Feygel, Fannie.

LEVINE: And how about your brother?

EDELMAN: My oldest brother, his name was Sender. And my other brother was Sam, Zava, we called him.

LEVINE: And, um, was your cousin living with you?

EDELMAN: No. My cous--, the reason my cousin came with us is that my oldest brother Sender had died.

LEVINE: Oh, how did he die?

EDELMAN: Just before we were leaving for America. She had parents right there, but my mother was in no position to take care of the thr-- we were three small children. So my mother took the niece with her to take care of us, help with us. Because my mother was very, you know, your -- your oldest son, he was nineteen, eighteen or nineteen.

LEVINE: What did he die of?

EDELMAN: (she sighs) I tell you the truth, I'm -- all I know is that we had -- thing we had no money to call a doctor. He burned up from the high temperature. The diphtheria? No, the typhus. That's, that's, you know, during the war, that, because with the soldiers killed, (I never saw someone killed in the streets and all that) that all brought a lot of, uh, sicknesses. So it hit him, and, so that's how my cousin came with us.

LEVINE: So do you remember seeing a lot of soldiers?

EDELMAN: Oh, yes. They lived in our house.

LEVINE: They moved in with you?

EDELMAN: No. We had two empty apartments, sure.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about them, any contact that you had with them?

EDELMAN: All I can tell you is that the Germans at that time were very good to the, to all the population, to Jews and everything. And we had no fear, my mother had no fear. I didn't know the difference, but my mother didn't have any fear. Don't forget, my father wasn't there, and they were very nice. And my older sister was a blonde, and she didn't look Jewish. She looked like a German. She was bl-- and the soldiers were crazy about her. When they used to get packages from their, havin' their wives or, so chocolate around, they would give her. And I remember I was so jealous, why they didn't give me. (she laughs) You know, you're children. We have the same thing.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did you observe? Do you remember any ways of observing when you were there?

EDELMAN: I don't know.

LEVINE: Do you remember any holidays, religious holidays?

EDELMAN: Yeah, but I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

LEVINE: Was your mother a good cook?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

EDELMAN: If she had - if she had (laughs) yeah, true.

LEVINE: What did she make? Do you remember?

EDELMAN: All I know, we weren't thin. (she laughs) We were pretty -- until the war.

LEVINE: Did you have any chores that you had to do when you were there?

EDELMAN: In the house? No, I was tomboy. My older sister, Fannie, she used to, she was -- she was twenty months older than I, but it's a difference, so she was more, when Mama tell her little things, to dust and everyth--. She would do that.

LEVINE: What did you like to do?

EDELMAN: (she laughs) Play. Oh, I used to, I liked, I was a real tomboy.

LEVINE: Do you remember any games you played, or things, activities you had when you were there?

EDELMAN: No, not too mu-- don't you see? We were disrupted, because we, when we left Pinsk, you know? Almost, I don't know exactly how many years we were away. I think it had to be till the war ended, so it must have been at least two-and-a-half to three years. So that's, so we were in Poland, and that was a different life.

LEVINE: So do you remember leaving Pinsk?

EDELMAN: (she sighs) To a certain extent, I do. No, I couldn't say that. I don't really remember. First of all, I had the night, what they call that? I was missing vitamin A, and after three o'clock I couldn't see till the next day when the, gee, my mother used to feel so bad. The kids playing, and I . . .

LEVINE: Well, then how was it you could see the next day?

EDELMAN: Yeah, till a certain time of the day, I don't know when the, the next day I would see also till late afternoon, three o'clock. And it's a, uh, what they call it? Night, no, there's something, I knew it. There was a name, there's a name for it.

LEVINE: Would you take anything for it, any food or any medicine?

EDELMAN: Whatever they would --gave us. All I know, my mother used to tell me that she used to - that she used to cry for me that I had to sit and do nothing while all the children were playing. See, I don't remember having it, but my mother used to tell me.

LEVINE: Well, did you get over it?

EDELMAN: Oh, sure. It takes about three weeks.

LEVINE: And how did you get over it?

EDELMAN: Nature. There was no doctors. The food, I suppose. We had better food. I know it's a vitamin A deficiency.

LEVINE: I see.

EDELMAN: Like you got to eat liver and other things. Where did you get liver in the war?

LEVINE: So how did the war affect your family?

EDELMAN: Very much.

LEVINE: In what ways?

EDELMAN: In a way where we didn't have food to eat, because my father wasn't there, and there was, my brother, the oldest one was only about fourteen years old, so those are the things.

LEVINE: Did you have any animals, or did you raise any vegetables or anything like that?

EDELMAN: You couldn't, no. We . . .

LEVINE: So how did your family manage in those years?

EDELMAN: Well, that's how we, that's why we left Pinsk, because there would -- my mother have no food to feed us with.

LEVINE: And did you go to relatives?

EDELMAN: Relatives don't look at you during a war. Everybody's for themselves. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So what did you do when you left? Where did you go?

EDELMAN: Well, where the Germans sent us. Germans sent us, they fed us. We had food to eat, and places to sleep. Then when we got to a destination, they went to different villages and the Polish people weren't so anxious to take you in, but the Germans were very strict with it. You have to you -- have to take them in, or else you'll go to jail. So at the beginning I suppose it wasn't so pleasant, but they started -- when they knew us already, and how nice we were and everything, they were crazy about--. They cried af--, when we were leaving.

LEVINE: So you stayed with one particular family?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: For that time.

EDELMAN: Not -- a separate apartment, but with that particular family we stood the whole time. And the, uh, two boys, with my older brother and the younger one, the Germans took them to work on the roads, make roads. We were pretty small kids, so my mother, uh, my mother used to see them. She used to bring them food, you know. It was quite a distance, but they, she used to get together with other women, and they'd, and we had the -- there was, in this village there were three Jewish families. They were very good to us. They have, at the beginning, you know, where to cook, like for Shabbas [Sabbath], you know, and all that. So they were afraid, because they didn't think we were that kosher, you know, and all that. So the rabbi and there -- gave out an order that, "Forget about whether it's kosher or not, you let them bring in their pot for Shabbas." In their oven, they had the oven. But they were nice. I know, there was a tailor, he used to make us, uh, moccasins, you know, for, instead of shoes. Very, that I remember.

LEVINE: Were your brothers who were working on the roads, were they earning money?

EDELMAN: No. They had their food.

LEVINE: They had their food, and you . . .

EDELMAN: And their lodging there. Of course, they were quite a distance away from us.

LEVINE: So the Polish family that took you in gave you lodging.

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then did people just bring you food, give you food?

EDELMAN: Well, my mother, um, uh, --. See, my older sister knew more about it than I. She used to, uh, go --. See, I had an aunt and uncle, my mother's an aunt and uncle with us in the same apartment, had to be. So my mother used to leave us there, and she would go with, I suppose got money, with small things like needles, uh, things, household, and go from -- to sell from house to house, and she made a few dollars and was able to buy. And then, you know, they're farmers, and they would allow us to

, uh--. When they used to dig up their potatoes, they purposely left potato and the women like my mother used to go and pick them, like. We used to go to the forest to pick blueberries, strawberries.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Then how did you, how did you come to leave, then? What happened?

EDELMAN: Leave what?

LEVINE: To leave Poland?

EDELMAN: Oh, to leave Poland? The war ended.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the war ended?

EDELMAN: No. The war, I only remember from hearsay.

LEVINE: Did you hear from your father, uh, once the war ended?

EDELMAN: During the war, not a thing.

LEVINE: How about after it?

EDELMAN: Oh, after the war, we have pl—we have money. My father used to send us, and the relatives were nice to us already, because we had money.

LEVINE: How did your father know where you were?

EDELMAN: We were back in Pinsk.

LEVINE: Oh, after the war you went back.

EDELMAN: Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: And to your own house?

EDELMAN: Yeah. And at the beginning we couldn't get into the house because, you know, they, uh, ransacked it, those that were left. Until my brother, the older brother (he was very handy) fixed up the apartment, we had to stay with relatives. but they already took us in, because we had money, and they were--. My mother used to loan them the money, and they were doing business with my, uh, father's money. But then, then they, and then, of course, my father already started to get us out. It wasn't that easy.

LEVINE: Were there many Jewish families in Pinsk?

EDELMAN: Oh, sure. Pinsk was quite a big city. I think Pinsk was a city of sixty thousand.

LEVINE: And did the families, the Gentiles and the Jewish families get along in Pinsk?

EDELMAN: I suppose to -- when there was no war, they got along, I imagine so.

LEVINE: You don't remember any anti-Semitism there?

EDELMAN: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So then your father, did he send you tickets?

EDELMAN: You know, have them make out the necessary papers. My brother {should rest in peace} was alive back then. Of course, we couldn't read it. It was in English. And he figured -- he had big ho-- ideas about going to America.

LEVINE: Your brother.

EDELMAN: Unfortunately he didn't make it. He died, nineteen years. He would have been, he was the oldest.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about America when you were still in Poland, what you thought it would be like?

EDELMAN: Nothing.

LEVINE: Nothing, uh-huh.

EDELMAN: I was too young. No.

LEVINE: So then, do you remember leaving Pinsk to come to America?

EDELMAN: I remember, I don't remember too much leaving Pinsk, but during the period of coming here, we have plenty -- took us three months to get here.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your mother packed or that you took with you?

EDELMAN: No. She took all the bedding and she had, boy, I wish I had those gorgeous silver candlesticks. But we lost part of the luggage here on the way. So one, we lost all the luggage, but then one package came back.

LEVINE: Were you sad when you left Pinsk, or how did you feel?

EDELMAN: I couldn't tell you.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you know how your mother felt about coming?

EDELMAN: My mother felt, because she left her -- detsa [ph]?

LEVINE: Yeah. So, uh, where did you go to take the ship?

EDELMAN: (she laughs) It wasn't that easy. We first, we first, uh, had to go to Warsaw. But on the way to Warsaw, before Warsaw, uh, on the

train, we had American delegates. Without them we couldn't have made it. See, it was after the war, and people, they were from Pinsk, but they were in America, and they went out to help the people without them. So, on the way to Brest, yeah, that's Brest, Brest Litovsk, something like that. So during the night, I don't remember that, but my mother told me. This train stopped in the middle of nowhere, and the delegates weren't around. The Polish, the Poles stopped, you know, ransom money, otherwise they were going to kill us. So whoever had money gave. My mother had money to come here, my father sent it, so she gave it. And my father, when we came here, he couldn't understand why my mother needed so much money.

She used to send telegrams, because otherwise everyone wants to save themselves. So, people that were coming to America, but didn't have the means, what are they going-- so those that had, had to give. So that's what, it's all we had. When we came to Brest, then we got to Warsaw. We stood in Warsaw about three weeks at a nice family. I don't remember. And, uh, then, see, that was during the Russian revolution. They were still fighting. And the American consul ran to Danzig, that's Gdansk. And, uh, we had to follow them. So we went there, and it took another three weeks before we got the ship, the Susquehanna. And we were one month on the water.

LEVINE: Hmm. Did anybody get killed on the train who didn't have money to pay the ransom?

EDELMAN: No, they weren't killed. Of course, you see, that's why we needed the delegates. They're the ones that were more, let's say, handlen [negotiating] with them, you know, to barter with them, whatever. That's what they used to do.

LEVINE: So when you got to the Susquehanna, did you have to have any examinations?

EDELMAN: Oh, we all, sure. And in Danzig, too. They used to comb you, oh, sure. And doctors examine if you have glaucoma or something, they wouldn't let you through. Oh, sure.

LEVINE: What was the trip like on the Susquehanna?

EDELMAN: Oh, God knows. (she laughs) All I know, I was sick. We were in steerage.

LEVINE: What was steerage like for you?

EDELMAN: It's worse than for pigs. That's all what, I don't know what they fed us. I understand my mother used to say just potatoes and herring or something.

LEVINE: Did you have like your own plate and you would go up and get food, or did you go to a dining room?

EDELMAN: It's a dining room. You know, sure. It isn't that, if you went first class, I imagine (she laughs) you would go. But not steerage.

LEVINE: Did you go up on deck at all?

EDELMAN: I suppose we did. I don't remember too much.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: So, um, do you remember the Susquehanna sailing into the New York Harbor? Do you remember when the ship came into New York?

EDELMAN: Yeah, a little bit, I think, I remember. I remember seeing the first black person I ever saw.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought?

EDELMAN: We never saw one before. Well, we had -- it's in there. We had, my, uh, kid sister was hospitalized in the, on the Susquehanna.

LEVINE: Why was she hospitalized?

EDELMAN: She was --. Uh, see, my brother -- it was separate. The men were separate, the women separate. So my brother was sick, and my mother went to see how he is. So she begged her, "Don't go with me." You know, because the corridors were quite narrow, and going back, but, you know, she was a child, young. She wouldn't leave my mother. She went with her. And a young girl was carrying a kettle of hot water, and she bumped against my sister, all over the face and body. So they took her right to -- they had a hospital on the ship. Took her up there. She was quite sick, you know. And when we got into Ellis Island they took her to the hospital there, and my father couldn't take us off.

LEVINE: Did your father come to Ellis Island?

EDELMAN: Sure!

LEVINE: Did you meet him, even though you couldn't go off.

EDELMAN: Of course, of course.

LEVINE: What was it, what was it like seeing him?

EDELMAN: It's very hard to say. It's almost seventy-four years. (she laughs) I don't --.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EDELMAN: Oh, every day he used to come, but . . .

LEVINE: She had to stay in the hospital for how long?

EDELMAN: Three weeks.

LEVINE: So you and your mother . . .

EDELMAN: We weren't there, I think, ten days. Because my father worked with the HIAS, and finally the HIAS worked out with the government, and my father, uh, posted a five hundred dollar bond. God forbid if she has to go back, you know, to send her back. So, uh, then, but they healed her so beautiful that we don't know to this very day which side of the body she was, couldn't tell. And she doesn't remember either.

LEVINE: Does your sister ever, did she tell you what it was like, the treatment she got in the hospital at Ellis Island?

EDELMAN: Well, no, she didn't talk too much about it. They were very, they were nice to her. And then the people that used to visit, their family, a lot of people that were sick. And, uh, saw a little girl, they used to say, "Oh, I saw your mother. Shhh. And we gave her our regards." So she used to say, "You know my mother like I know my father." (she laughs) She was smart. She knew that--.

LEVINE: So what did you do for the ten days when you were at Ellis Island?

EDELMAN: Couldn't tell you. All I know, I hated it.

LEVINE: Why did you hate it?

EDELMAN: It was, I don't know whether I had a, I just couldn't cover myself with the blankets. I couldn't sleep on their mattresses. I don't know, it must have been clean or something. I, so you -- I used to throw off the mat-- and we slept on the springs. Now, I don't think it was dirty. I'm not going to say it was dirty, because I don't know. But somehow I didn't like the looks, I suppose. You know, we suffered that way.

LEVINE: You brought your own bedding with you?

EDELMAN: No. That was from Ellis Island. They supplied. Now, I don't remember eating, where we ate. I don't remember those things.

LEVINE: Do you remember losing your luggage?

EDELMAN: No. Because my pa-- they, my mother (should rest in peace) or my brothers, they put it on the - ins - on the ship, and that was the end of it.

LEVINE: So when you did get to go off, did your father come for you, and you went off with him?

EDELMAN: My father was there every day. My God.

LEVINE: Did he bring you anything, or . . .

EDELMAN: Oh, sure he did. The first time we had bananas with it. But I knew, I think I saw somebody peeling it. (she laughs) I didn't eat it with the skin. But, of course, that's the first time I ever saw --. We -- Europe we had no bananas. So that's it. It wasn't that easy.

LEVINE: So when your father came and you and your mother and your brother went to New York, where did you go?

EDELMAN: No, they didn't go to New York.

LEVINE: Where did they go?

EDELMAN: My - my father lived in Jersey.

LEVINE: Oh, in Jersey.

EDELMAN: In Jersey City, he used to come. But we couldn't get off Ellis Island. We had to stay right there. We couldn't get off it. The only time we went off, when they gave us already the papers, the exit papers, we went out.

LEVINE: And when you did get the exit papers, then what? Where did you go, in Jersey City?

EDELMAN: When my father took us back to Jersey Cit-- at that time, my father couldn't take us to Jersey City because the house that he bought wasn't ready. The landlord didn't, so my mother's brother took us in, in Brooklyn. He took us until we could go. They were wonderful people, my uncle and aunt. They don't come like that any more.

LEVINE: Well, what was it like when you went to their house?

EDELMAN: Oh, (?), so I can tell you. If I told you, when we, my father took us off and we were walking, I don't know what street it was. We have--. What? Maybe two hundred people walking, they recognized that we were refugees, you know, and especially they saw my older sister with those beautiful curly hair, blonde, well, they all went crazy. So (she laughs) you can imagine. And I looked bewildered. I couldn't imagine what the hell they're looking at.

LEVINE: Well, had these people come from Europe, too, or they were Americans, mostly?

EDELMAN: These were strangers that saw that we were refugees, that we had just come off the ship. (she laughs) You feel kind of funny, I suppose.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But did they treat you nicely?

EDELMAN: Where?

LEVINE: These people who came to see you?

EDELMAN: No, they didn't, they just looked for that, that's all. No. These are people, it's just like I would see a crowd, I'd go with the crowd.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay there in Brooklyn?

EDELMAN: Uh, in my, uh, uncle's house, I think we stood close to a month, because my father had a hard time getting out the people, because otherwise we couldn't get in.

LEVINE: And then did you, do you remember moving to Jersey City?

EDELMAN: Yeah. And my aunt didn't waste any time. She put us right in public school, even in Brooklyn. Yeah, she didn't, she says, "You'll have to go." Right? We went. Some kids were nice to us, and some weren't. It's like children. But you, you feel it.

LEVINE: Did you know any English?

EDELMAN: How could we?

LEVINE: So what was that like, learning English?

EDELMAN: I had a right - a very bright idea. It's hard. I used to listen, and pick up a little bit. But, of course, it takes time. I'll never forget my uncle sent me across the street to buy him cigarettes. Oh, I couldn't say no. And he wanted us to get used to, you know. I thought, I wanted to die rather than cross, because, you know, I --. But I -- I got him the cigarettes, the right.

LEVINE: How did you, how did you manage to get them?

EDELMAN: Well, I just, well, I said cigarettes, and the name, I suppose. And, uh, so if I said something in Yiddish, you know.

LEVINE: So, um, then when you got to Jersey City you must have gone into a school there.

EDELMAN: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Do you remember the school?

EDELMAN: Sure.

LEVINE: Was it different from Pinsk? Were you in school in Pinsk? No, you weren't in school.

EDELMAN: In Pinsk I was the last six months, they put me in the Zionist Organization, the Hebrew. My older sister was put in the Workman's Circle. That's Yiddish. So, uh, I did pick up a lot of Hebrew. I was good at it. So that's all the schooling we had.

LEVINE: Did you like school in this country?

EDELMAN: Oh, yeah. We made, my older sister and I, we went through every class from the first grade to the eighth grade, we made it in four years, because they used to skip us. We would have made it half a year earlier, but the principal of the school wanted us on a certain holiday, and my father was religious, wouldn't let us go, so I missed it. I cried plenty. (she laughs) I'll never forget it. So, but we made it in four years. I graduated high school. I graduated at the age of eighteen.

LEVINE: And what did you do after high school?

EDELMAN: After high school, my brother had a hardware store my father had bought, so I used to help him?

LEVINE: Was your father in the hardware store business?

EDELMAN: No. My father was a painter, but he bought the hardware store for my brother. And he used to, and I used to help him after school. And, uh, then I worked right on the avenue in a small department store. I was a bookkeeper and cashier, until I got married.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

EDELMAN: My husband and I met through relatives. My, uh, my mother's, it's my mother's brother-in-law's brother. We were very friendly, so my mother had him for dinner. And they were young people. They had twin little boys, ten months old, something like that. And, and this cousin, this, uh, to us he wasn't really a relative, it's just my mo-my uncle's brother. So, uh, he said one day to his, that was a cousin of his, he says, "Nat, do you have anything to do Sunday?" He says, "No." He says, "You want to go to Jersey. I don't know the way. You'll help me, you know, go and buy." He says, "There's couple nice girls, huh?" So they came. I happened to have a date and, uh, he came five o'clock, and this relative says to me, "Where are you going?" I said, "Well, I have a date." He says, "Why do you think I brought this guy? To see your mother?" (she laughs) So I ran down and told my date to go, we have company, and that was it.

LEVINE: Did you like your husband right off?

EDELMAN: Did I like him? (disturbance to the microphone) Oh, I . . .

LEVINE: Be careful. Show me after we finish. So you liked him right away?

EDELMAN: Oh, yeah. He was a handsome guy, a wonderful fellow. We were married, uh, a year later, 1931. It just was sixty-two years last October that I would have been married.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

EDELMAN: Nat, Nachman in Yiddish, Nat, Nathan, Edelman, yeah. I had a wonderful life, with --.

LEVINE: What did your husband do?

EDELMAN: He's a dress manufacturer.

LEVINE: In New York?

EDELMAN: Uh huh. We lived in Jersey, after we got married. After we got married we went, see, we even got married in the height of the depression, 1931. His bank closed, he couldn't go on with his business, so we got married and went to California. We were there eight months, but it didn't agree with me. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Really? Why not?

EDELMAN: I was longing for home, unconsciously, subconsciously. Not that I knew. I was very happy. But he used to say to me, "Why did you cry during the night?" Now, I didn't know I was crying during the night. You see? So he took me to the doctor, and the doctor says, "I wish I was as healthy as she is. She's longing for home." (she laughs) "She's never been away," he says. "Go back. And come back, it happens ninety-nine percent," he says, "with all the newlyweds." Because don't forget, sixty-two years ago California was quite a distance.

LEVINE: Yes.

EDELMAN: And, uh, especially in my, uh, parents -- now, when I graduated from school, and Hebrew school (I went to Hebrew school) and the Hebrew school teacher said to my father, "Let her go to the Hebrew high school in New York." Now, my father wouldn't let me go.

LEVINE: Why not?

EDELMAN: He wouldn't. He just wouldn't let me. If we had had a high school, a Hebrew high school in Jersey, he would have allowed. But, you see. It's a different world.

LEVINE: Was that because you were a girl? If you had been a boy, would he have let you go, you think?

EDELMAN: I imagine so.

LEVINE: Now, how did you feel about it?

EDELMAN: Either way it didn't bother me too much. Don't forget I was young at that time, and --. I tell you the truth, I wanted to go to work. That's the first thing I wanted to do. I wanted to make money. I only worked about a year-and-a-half, that's all, my whole --.

LEVINE: So you came back from California with your husband?

EDELMAN: Came back, I started all over again.

LEVINE: In the dress business?

EDELMAN: He was a very aggressive person. He, and we did, he retired at the age of forty-nine. Well, I made him get out. It was getting too difficult. Because the, uh, the Jewish help, the operators, or the Italian, they retired. Now, the young ones wouldn't go in the shop. They already become more professionals, so you had to work with the, uh, Puerto Ricans and the blacks, and you couldn't run a, that's why the entire dress industry ran away from New York. They started opening up factories in different countries, because on account of labor. We didn't have the right labor any more.

LEVINE: So did you and your husband have children?

EDELMAN: No, no. We were two, we were very happy.

LEVINE: Did you work after you married? No.

EDELMAN: I only worked in the place during the second World War, when the bookkeeper left, because her husband was transferred to Texas, so I came in for the two-and-a-half or three years. Then we moved to, we built our home in Spring Valley, New York, and we lived there. And my husband didn't sit home. He dabbled in real estate.

LEVINE: In New York City, or . . .

EDELMAN: In Spring Valley.

LEVINE: Spring Valley, uh-huh.

EDELMAN: Yeah. He died in '81, thirteen years. Last week I had a Yurtsayt [death anniversary]. Today I have Yurtsayt for my father. Yeah, but . . .

LEVINE: What do you think, difference it made, the fact that you came here as an immigrant when you were ten years old? Do you think that had an effect on your life?

EDELMAN: No doubt it did.

LEVINE: Can you think of how it might have . . .

EDELMAN: I think we - I think we appreciate more than the American-born, because the American-born didn't go through what the Europeans went through. Even though I don't remember a lot of things, but I've gone through. Sure. And we appreciate more.

LEVINE: What do you feel very proud of having done in your lifetime, feel satisfied about?

EDELMAN: Well, I'm proud of one thing. We did everything. My, see, my husband and I, we lived to help the family, whoever needs help. His family, he had family in Europe, in Warsaw, he had a mother, two sisters, and the mother died a natural death at that time, but the two sisters and the family, naturally, Hitler got them. But that's was our life. We

were helping. And after that, my husband was an ardent Zionist, and whatever we could, to this very day, I follow the same thing. Look at all the, Hadassah, everywhere. That's all my, I go, I give whatever I can. 1985 they honored me, the United Jewish Appeal. I don't live for myself. I want to help.

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

EDELMAN: I feel, what can I tell you? He's gone thirteen years. There is not a minute of the day that he's not in my heart. But life has to go on.

LEVINE: Well, I guess you are happy that you had such a nice life with him.

EDELMAN: Oh, what a life. He died just six months before our fiftieth wedding anniversary, and . . .

LEVINE: Was he also from Poland?

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, let's see. Today is your birthday.

EDELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you're eighty-four. Uh-huh.

EDELMAN: I'm the only one left. They're all gone.

LEVINE: Do you have things that you want to do now, at this time?

EDELMAN: I have - I have friends here. We go out sometimes. But my, I have my kid sister's husband, my brother-in-law, he just re-- two years ago re-married. My sister is gone. In '89 she died, it'll be five years in May. So he remarried. He comes every week, once a week, takes me shopping, we go out. Yeah. And, uh, we go to different shows.

LEVINE: And I see it was your niece who came to Ellis Island and picked up this form for you?

EDELMAN: This must be my niece, Gloria. There's nobody else, that knows. Because I didn't. I know she did it for her mother. Her mother's name is on there, but she told me about it. I think she's, tell you the truth, she sent me paraphernalia, but I threw it out. I just forgot. She must have, leave it to her. That's our (?). She's a wonderful person.

LEVINE: Now, do you have other nieces and nephews?

EDELMAN: Oh, I have wonderful nieces and nephews, and grand-nieces and grand-nephews. You should see it, once I'll get off there, you'll see the pictures. I don't know where to put them anymore. Yeah, they're wonderful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to say about this country, or coming to this country, or . . .

EDELMAN: Oh, the country, I love. You couldn't, there's no other country like it. I've been everywhere. I've seen the world. We've traveled. I was seven times in Israel. I was six times with my husband. In 1990 I went by myself, because I never told anybody, but we, my, see, we're a small knit family, and we're very close. My, uh, sister-in-law, my brother's wife, we were like sisters. They were no different. Now, my older sister and brother-in-law are buried in Israel, because they gave their life for Israel, and their children felt that their place of rest is there. Now, I used to say to myself, I shou-- I wanted to go at least once to her grave, so Hadassah had a, uh . . .

LEVINE: A trip?

EDELMAN: A Israeli convention. Eighteen hundred people went. You should have seen. Thirty-one buses, when the buses used to line up, we'd all go to different, something, as long as I live, I'll never forget. I was there six times before with my husband. We used to stay months there, you know. It didn't make the impression that this last trip made.

LEVINE: Why do you think this trip made such an impression on you?

EDELMAN: I don't know why, but it just did. First thing my niece, she went also. She, right away, the very next day she, you can't go to the cemetery yourself, you have to get from the cemetery there. In Jewish they say the Khevre Kedishe [holy fraternity]. And they came, picked us up, and we went to the cemetery, and I said hello to my sister and brother-in-law. And I have a grandmother, my mother's mother is buried there. And, uh, I have cousins in Israel. I call them. I was in Jerusalem. I said, "I'm not traveling." It was in the end of May, it's already hot. I said, "You come here." They used to come and visit me. It was a beautiful two weeks, and I was very, see, that pushed me, because it wasn't easy to travel, let me tell you. So, uh, but I made it, and I was very happy, and I'm -- I am satisfied. Because my cousins, when they saw me, they said, "We never thought we'd see you again."

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else before we close?

EDELMAN: Well, that's it.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much for a very interesting interview.

EDELMAN: You're welcome.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Minnie Edelman, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on March 2, 1994. I'm here in Hallandale, Florida, at Mrs. Edelman's home, and I'm signing off.

EI-448/EDELMAN

