

EI-459

THELMA (TOBY) ROSENBERG MITTELMAN
BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 31, 1907
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 17, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 43:28
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1996
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

POLAND, 1920
AGE 13
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Mittelman is the wife of Abraham Mittelman,
Interview EI-458. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 2/5/1996.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's April
17, 1994. I'm going to be speaking with Thelma Mittelman, who
came . . .

MITTELMAN: My name, they called in Europe, they didn't call me Thelma.

LEVINE: What did they call you?

MITTELMAN: That was my name, Toby.

LEVINE: Toby.

MITTELMAN: Toby Rosenberg.

LEVINE: Toby Rosenberg.

MITTELMAN: Toby. T-O-B-Y.

LEVINE: Came from Poland when she was about thirteen.

MITTELMAN: When I came here, about thirteen, fourteen, that's the oldest.

LEVINE: And we think it's about 1920, about 1920, when you came.

MITTELMAN: Must have been. Who remembers that.

LEVINE: Okay. And we're here today, we're here in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in Mr. and Mrs. Mittelman's home. I've just spoken with Mr. Abraham Mittelman, who came from Lithuania, and their daughter, Lorraine Goldstein, is here with us. Okay. This is Janet Levine, and I'm with the National Park Service, and I want to say that whatever you remember will be good. So say your birth date first.

MITTELMAN: 31, August the 31, 1907.

LEVINE: Okay.

LORRAINE: '06.

LEVINE: August 31, 1906?

MITTELMAN: I always carry that around when I go out. 31, 1907.

LEVINE: '07, okay. And where were you born? What do you remember about where you were born?

MITTELMAN: Oh, boy. When my father left our country in Europe to go to this country, we were very young. We were rich people. We were rich in the beginning. That was before the wartime. So my father came over to my mother and said, "Let's all go to the other, let's go to America."

LEVINE: What did your father do?

MITTELMAN: My father, in Europe, I don't remember. But I know what he done here, my father. He was a carpenter. He was a glazer.

LEVINE: A glazer. Uh-huh. And what was his name, your father?

MITTELMAN: My father's name? Joe.

LEVINE: Joe Rosenberg.

MITTELMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

MITTELMAN: My mother's name was Bela Ruhu [ph], Bela Ruhu [ph].

LEVINE: Could you spell Ruhu [ph]?

MITTELMAN: That's what my father called my mother, Bela Ruhu [ph].

LEVINE: Was Ruhu [ph] her maiden name?

MITTELMAN: Her last name was Rosenberg.

LEVINE: No, before she was married.

LORRAINE: Gross.

LEVINE: Gross.

MITTELMAN: I gave her all the pictures of ours, the whole family, and I gave her papers. She must have them all.

LEVINE: Okay. So, Gross. Now, what was your mother like? What kind of a lady?

MITTELMAN: My mother was the most wonderful woman in the world. Not because everybody, every daughter says that. Listen, he knows it, my son-in-law that just passed away knows it, the way I got along with my mother. I can't get over it. She died one, two, three. She died, she was not, she was about seventy, seventy-one years old.

LEVINE: What kind of a person was she? What do you remember about her, when you were a little girl?

MITTELMAN: My mother was a good mother, a housekeeper, stayed in the house and cooked and made all kind of goodies.

LEVINE: What kind of things . . .

MITTELMAN: Now, there, I don't remember. When I remember the wartime there, but I remember when my father brought us over to this country.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about coming here, what do you remember about the wartime over in Europe?

MITTELMAN: The wartime?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MITTELMAN: The wartime I remember my father came over to my mother and said, "Let's all go to this country." My mother said, "I have money, I have a home, a beautiful home." I don't remember. "I have a beautiful home, and I want to stay here. I don't want to go to this other country." He said, "Well, if you don't want to go, then I'll go myself." He packed himself up. We had it good. We were pretty rich at that time. I think it took about three years, and the war broke out, and then my father couldn't get us here no more, because during the wartime we couldn't get the . . .

LEVINE: So your father came first?

MITTELMAN: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Your father came here first?

MITTELMAN: Sure, he was here a long time.

LEVINE: And how many children?

MITTELMAN: We were eight kids.

LEVINE: And where were you in the birth order? Were you the oldest?

MITTELMAN: My sister and my aunt, my mother's, they died in the wartime, and I saw them dying.

LEVINE: What did you see?

MITTELMAN: The war came out, we had no home no more. They broke up our home. They took everything away from us. My father was here. They took, the war broke everything up. So my sister and my aunt, my mother, we had three brothers and we had two, so one sister died in the wartime. My aunt got diphtheria, and down there you couldn't get a doctor, you couldn't get nobody to take care of. At that time, I should have been dead instead of my sister. She was two years older than me. I don't know if I should tell you that, my aunt, my aunt, she was very seriously delirious, she said, "Come over and fix my hair." So my sister said to me, "No, you don't go over there. You're going to catch a cold." She did. She wouldn't let me go near my aunt. She was very bad. She was very sick. We were all living, eight people in one room.

LEVINE: Do you remember soldiers being in the town?

MITTELMAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember soldiers during the war?

MITTELMAN: Do I remember what?

LEVINE: Seeing soldiers in the town?

MITTELMAN: Sure. I seen them. I was, you know, I was younger, but I see what, we were so poor, on a Friday night there was richer people upstairs. We were waiting, we were living down on the floor. I see the picture now. My mother took an apron, and she said to me, "Tobala," she called me, "I want you to go upstairs and see if you can get any bread. We have no bread, we have no food." I was older. I have a, I have another sister just died, you know, about five years ago. My sister didn't want to go. She was very young. I took an apron and I went up to all the homes to get some bread. And we came home, my mother took the bread and locked it in the closet. Not because she was mean. We needed some for tomorrow. Then I was so hungry that I became blind. I became blind in the wartime. We had no more money to go, so somebody gave us money to go to Warsaw. There was a doctor there that told us what it was, what's the matter with my eyes, from hunger, I got blind. He must have given us money to buy some more food. I don't remember that. Then I went home. And the war went on and on and on. My aunt died. I don't remember where they buried her. The put us in a wagon. She was half dead, and my sister died, too, right after she died. I came to this country. After so many years the war was over, and my father sent papers for us to come to this country. He sent also a card for my sister to come here, but my father didn't know she died in the wartime. My mother's sister died. We had a, I had a tough time in Europe, I remember. We had no home. We had one room like this

for eight kids. But I don't remember, I don't remember my mother's, my mother's mother, I slept with her in the room, but I don't remember my father's mother or brother. His mother and father, I don't remember them. I remember my mother's, she was the most wonderful mother in the whole world. Not because she, every daughter could say that. He knows it, how I got along with my mother.

LEVINE: What was your grandmother like?

MITTELMAN: The one I remember?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MITTELMAN: She lived with us, too, a little old lady. You know, a lot of people don't want to sleep with her, and I loved her, I went and slept with her. But I don't remember, I know she died in the wartime. I don't remember no funerals. They didn't have no funerals. They just threw them away any old place. There was no funerals. It was a very sad life for me when my father left. And, uh, I remember a lot of things, and I don't even want to remember them, that's how bad they were. Very bad.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you want to say about what you remember about Poland?

MITTELMAN: I don't remember. It's a long time. When you have, I had it bad here, too, with my husband sick all the time, so my memory's a little gone.

LEVINE: So, tell me, when your father sent, uh, when you realized you were coming to America . . .

MITTELMAN: Yeah. He sent us, you know, papers, and . . .

LEVINE: Tickets? Did he send you . . .

MITTELMAN: I don't remember what class. I think it was, it wasn't the highest class. It was the middle class. That's a little cheaper. It was a lot of money.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember packing up to come? Who traveled with you?

MITTELMAN: To pack up? I don't remember. I suppose my mother did. What is there to pack? We had nothing to pack. But my father sent some money. The war was over, so he sent some money. We got some clothes. And, uh, we came to the Statue of Liberty. We saw right away.

LEVINE: What did you think? How did you feel when you saw it?

MITTELMAN: Ellis Island, yeah. And then my father came over to all of us, and he was looking for somebody. He says, "Where is Pearl?" Pale, they called her. So my mother said, "She died." Then he was looking for my aunt. She was leaving with us. She died, but he kissed us all and said, "Thank God I see your people." And he had some home for us. My father was a very, very good husband and a very good father. He bought a home for us before we came. And all my aunts was in this country. One died in Europe, but one, two aunts was in this country. So my father made a big dinner, the biggest dinner you ever saw in the house. Everybody was invited. I was so hungry, so I went over to the table. This I remember just like it was today. I went over to the table, and we had spoons around the dishes. So I

grabbed a couple of spoons and was hiding in, because if I don't get a spoon, I wouldn't be able to eat. That's the way it was on the boat, you know. We didn't get enough. And we had a beautiful home. We had a beautiful mother. She was a good mother. Not because she was my mother. One in a million. We never had an argument with my mother.

LEVINE: So who came on the boat with you?

MITTELMAN: Who came on the boat? Oh, yes, my brother died. I had another brother. He died in this country. A young boy killed him and took his feet off. He was the most closest to me. He came, my brother, three brothers came, and two sisters. A younger sister just died about five years ago, five years ago. She just died not long ago. She was younger than me.

LEVINE: So now you're the, you're alive. What other brothers and sisters do you have who are still alive?

MITTELMAN: That are still alive. I have one, two, three brothers alive.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what are their names?

MITTELMAN: One is, uh, the one that's alive is Frank, Max, Louie, that's it.

LEVINE: That's it. And your sister . . .

MITTELMAN: And my brother, Louie, I forgot to tell you, he was born in this country.

LEVINE: Oh.

MITTELMAN: My mother was forty-two years when she came here, and he didn't see my mother fifteen years and she had a baby. He's the one

that's a little close to me now. We were both born on the same day, August 31, 1907. We were born sixteen years. I'm sixteen years older than him, and we're still a little close together.

So he was born in this country. And the brother lost about, what was it, fifteen years ago, Dave? It must have been fifteen years ago. He was the closest to me. He worked . . .

LORRAINE: Two were born there that are here now.

MITTELMAN: We had a little candy store in this country, and we worked very hard. And what happened in the end? They broke up our store, they took everything away from us, in this country.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember the name of the ship that you came on?

MITTELMAN: Amsterdam.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MITTELMAN: Yeah, that was the ship.

LEVINE: And you came, and you must have left from Amsterdam.

MITTELMAN: What did you ask me?

LEVINE: Did you leave from Amsterdam, from the port?

MITTELMAN: We came in, you mean, you asked me if I came into this Statue, yes, with the Amsterdam ship.

LEVINE: Okay.

MITTELMAN: We were in the middle class, we were in the richer, because we couldn't afford it. And we were all sick on the boat except one brother. He was all right. And the one that gave the best

oranges and everything, they were on, I think, they must have been on the third class. The third class is always the best, I think.

LEVINE: No, first. First would be the best, then second, then there's third, and then there's steerage.

MITTELMAN: We were in the cheapest, because we couldn't afford it. He wrote down eight kids. Two of them did. And we had a beautiful time. My father treated us, he died not long ago. He died after my mother died. My mother could have lived if they noticed she had pneumonia. She had double pneumonia and didn't notice it. And she gave us a big party before, the night before she died. The day, she didn't know that she had pneumonia. She was sick. And she told me something, my daughter, the youngest one was supposed to get married in about a month. So she called me in the bedroom, my mother. At that time she was (?). She says, "Which dress should I wear to Lorraine's shower?" My mother asked me that question. It's a long time ago. I said, "Mama," she took out dresses, I said, "any dress you're going to wear, as long as you'll be there." She never made it. She died at night. She was only seventy-one years old. Imagine all the years that I over-lived her? I didn't want it. I lost a son-in-law, the best one in the world. He was good to me. He was so good to me. She knows it. I can't believe it. I can't get over it, because I'm sick. Anything I needed, this here walker, the doctor ordered me a walker because I walk too much, I get dizzy, I fall. So my husband had a walker, so he brought the walker over from the house, from Lorraine's, from his house, and said, "Here, that's too big for you. I'm going to go out and buy you one." But a

doctor ordered me one of these without money, because we don't have anything. She's the one that helps us out.

LEVINE: Okay, we'll, let's, when you first came to . . .

MITTELMAN: Those things I'm telling you now is on the machine, too?

LEVINE: Yeah. So tell me . . .

MITTELMAN: Everything I tell you is all the truth.

LEVINE: Okay.

MITTELMAN: I remember everything at that. There was a lot of things. But when we came to this country, my father had a home ready for us.

LEVINE: Tell me what you did when you first came here. Your father had a home ready. Where was the home?

MITTELMAN: The home was on 12th Street . . .

LORRAINE: Peshon [ph] Avenue?

MITTELMAN: Newark. It was in Newark, on 12th Street. On 12th Street, we had a home there.

LEVINE: Okay. And then, uh, did you go to school here at all?

MITTELMAN: Well, I was about thirteen years, and I didn't know, at that time we were in Europe, you had to have money to go to the school. If you don't have no money, here this country's wonderful. You have no money, you got a school. A lot of people in this country don't realize what a wonderful country this is. If I was only well I'd enjoy it here, the minute I came here. But, so, so my mother . . .

LEVINE: You went to school?

MITTELMAN: My mother couldn't, she called me over, she said, "Tobala, I'll wear any dress you say that's good. I'll be at Lorraine's, I'll be at Lorraine's shower."

LEVINE: Well, tell me when you first came, and you were living in 12th Street in Newark.

MITTELMAN: Oh, you want to know about . . .

LEVINE: And then you were going to go to school there?

MITTELMAN: Well, I saw that I, I'm twelve years old, or thirteen. I have to know how to talk to people. I didn't know a word of this country, all Jewish. So, uh, I said, I don't remember who, I said I would like to go to school. I went to school, I said to the teacher, "I'd like to come to school." She said, "But you'll have to go with small kids." I says, "I don't care who I come with, as long as I can learn a little bit." And she put me in with all small kids, and I loved it. Then, then she said to me, "I see you want to learn." I said, "I do." She said, "Stay after school and I'll help you out."

LEVINE: Do you remember that teacher?

MITTELMAN: Exactly. And I said, "Okay." I went to school, and she stayed with me after school, and she taught me. And then when I became eighteen years old, I went with my brother, my brother, Max, that's the next, older than me. He said, "I'm going to go to night school. You want to go?" I said, "Yeah." In a short time, from the day school, I couldn't learn too much. I mean, I couldn't become a teacher, but enough to learn to read, to

write. And then I bought a (?). We got married, his mother took out the last couple of dollars. Oh, he had a mother. And we bought a little candy store. We worked so hard. We worked hard in the store. Years back you stayed till, you stayed till about two o'clock in the morning, ice cream was three cents an ice cream cone. And I loved the store, I loved the people there. But then it became very bad. The colored people were all right. It was the children that were a little tough, you know. They used to come in. I want to tell you something. It was the funniest thing. It's funny to people, but to me they took my, two kids came in. One stood by the door, held it open, and one came over to me and said, "I want two packs of cigarettes." I said, "Okay, what kind?" And he took his cigarettes. The door was wide open. I thought one of the boys had the door open. Out he ran. He went to sleep. I used to send him to sleep afternooon. I took care of the candy store, and I liked it.

LEVINE: Now, was that in Newark?

MITTELMAN: That was, that was, uh, the candy store was on the, 16th Avenue, Abe, wasn't it, Abe? He's sleeping, he's snoring. On 16th Avenue we lived, in a very poor little neighborhood. But the people, the most wonderful people in the world, those people where we lived, the poor neighborhood, they were so nice. Then I had my first, my first daughter, Elaine. They heard she was sick, they all run in to help me. A poor neighborhood, and the Italian people there. There was a saloon there, and every birthday used to come and they gave me fifty dollars, a birthday present. I enjoyed it. The poor neighborhood, because the people were poor and they were kind.

So one of the nurses that come to take care of us, people change today. She said that people are not the same no more. And I think it's true.

LEVINE: Yeah. Tell me how you met your husband.

MITTELMAN: My husband? My sister and I always went out together, the one that just died. We had tickets. We belonged to a club.

LEVINE: What club?

MITTELMAN: Oh, I don't remember. That was on High Street. We took a bus on High Street, I remember.

LEVINE: What would you do in the club?

MITTELMAN: Well, we, the club, they sold tickets. We go places. Then they sold tickets to go out for a good time to Bear Mountain. So, uh, I don't know if he belonged to the club or he just bought a ticket. So he came on, I just lost, I lost a brother-in-law. My sister's husband. He was the most wonderful thing in the world. So he was his friend. They bought tickets together, and they came on a, what do you call it, on a bus. And all of a sudden, you know, boys and girls, I was only maybe about nineteen or something at that time, I met him, I was, I married at twenty-two, so I was very young at that time.

LEVINE: What did you like about him?

MITTELMAN: That's the whole trouble. I married him, he didn't have so much, he didn't have much money. But one friend came over, his friend came over to me. He said, "You want to spend a day around, you know, when you get off the bus, you have friends, you walk around. So his friend came over to me, he says, "Come

on, let's have a good time here." So this one come over, and I said, "I'm going out with him." He used to dress so beautifully. He was so handsome. So we went two years, two years. We had a good time. We went all over. Not big places. We never had a lot of money.

LEVINE: What would you do for dates? Where would you go? What would you do?

MITTELMAN: Where?

LEVINE: When you went on a date, what would you do?

MITTELMAN: Oh, after we kept steady company. So he'd come over to my house. My mother served him. My mother was very good. We lived, I don't know if you know that neighborhood, Greekburg [ph]? We lived near (?) Park. My father bought another home for my mother, and we lived near, not far from Greekburg [ph] Park. We used to go to the park together. We used to go to shows together. We went to Jewish shows in New York. We, I had a good time. But since, since he fell and got hurt, me, I fell over there where you're sitting and I broke four ribs on me. Never had a good time no more. I wasn't going to bother with that. I remembered much more, but I didn't want to remember. My mother, they used to give her flour in the wartime before we came to this country, they gave us flour, some funny flour. Any flour was good to make. So she baked. They had a, they had a stove for (?). They had to sleep over the, there was the stove, and there we used to sleep upstairs, four people. It was warm, so we slept upstairs.

LEVINE: What, do you remember where you lived? What did it look like?

MITTELMAN: Where I lived in Europe?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MITTELMAN: Well, they got so bad they lost the home. The soldiers took away, killed everything. So I remember that. I know we moved down to a big, a big, something like this room here. There was about six beds here, no floor, like sand, dirt, you know.

LEVINE: Dirt, uh-huh.

MITTELMAN: So we all slept two, like the girls, my sisters, two sisters was living yet. And my grandmother, may she rest in peace, I slept with her. She's a beautiful woman. But I don't remember my, that was my father's mother, and I don't remember my mother's mother. I never remembered. I don't know why.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house before the war, before you . . .

MITTELMAN: I remember we had a rich home.

LEVINE: What was that like, the home you had before the war came?

MITTELMAN: A beautiful home.

LEVINE: What, do you remember the kitchen? What did the kitchen look like?

MITTELMAN: I know there was about ten rooms. I can't remember just the way they were. I know we had enough food, we had everything to eat. When the war came, the soldiers chased us out, and they put us downstairs, basement, like a basement. But the day I'll never forget, when I took my apron and went to collect bread. And my mother took the key. She gave us a piece of bread and

locked the door not to eat it up in one day. We had to wait another week on a Friday to get more bread. They were rich people. I don't remember why. We were the poor. We had no bathroom, no tub, and a washer over the sink. If you had to go to the bathroom, you had to go about four blocks down, like a wall, in between the city. I had it tough there. But I was young that time, so I took it. Now I can't take much things no more. I went a lot here. I went through a lot here.

LEVINE: And you said you were in Livinia Gubernia?

MITTELMAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Livinia Gubernia in Poland?

MITTELMAN: Warsaw.

LEVINE: Near Warsaw.

MITTELMAN: I didn't live there, but when the doctor found out I went blind from hunger, so somebody paid for, get me to Warsaw.

LEVINE: Oh, to Russia, uh-huh.

MITTELMAN: To Warsaw, down there they had a big doctor.

LORRAINE: Warsaw.

MITTELMAN: I remember just like today. I must have been about eight years old, seven years old. No food, no food at all. And my father couldn't get us here, because the war was going on.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was it like seeing your father after all that time?

MITTELMAN: How I what?

LEVINE: What was it like when you saw your father again?

MITTELMAN: Oh, my God. I remembered my father good. When he left I was about seven or so. Boy, he couldn't be a better, a better scenery. Everybody was down there by the place. What do you call that?

LORRAINE: Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Ellis Island.

MITTELMAN: Yeah. And I remember the boat so easy. And my brother, the one they just killed about seven, eight years ago, he was the only one well on the boat. We were all seasick. Everyone was sick. He went outside on the deck, and they were throwing from the, the better deck throw oranges and bread and everything, and my brother, the one that got killed with the car, he bended over, caught the oranges, and brought them in for us to eat. He was, he got killed from a car, a kid, in this country. He was the oldest one.

LEVINE: What do you remember about when you first came here? What was so different? What are the things that struck you?

MITTELMAN: Well, I've seen a lot of, I'll tell you what it was. I might as well tell you the truth. We didn't have no colored people in Europe. So I saw a colored man. Oh! I could have run after to watch him. I never saw a colored man in my life. In Europe we never had them. I didn't think anything was terrible but, I mean, colored . . .

LEVINE: It was unusual, yeah.

MITTELMAN: Right now, I want to tell you something. Right now some of those colored people are nicer than the, you get along with the white. Not all of them. So my daughter said, when I moved, she said, "Mama, you're giving up the store, so remember that everybody's different. You're going to find everything different." I don't like what this one was doing, this one was doing. I got along in the candy store. Everybody was my friends. I loved the candy store. But I had a, I lost a sister-in-law in this country. We didn't, my father got old, he lost a job, you know, we didn't have nothing to eat.

LEVINE: What was your father doing here for work?

MITTELMAN: My father in this country was a, he was a carpenter. He done everything. He was a glazier.

LORRAINE: They had a chicken farm.

MITTELMAN: He used to put glass in, a glazier. He was a carpenter, and he made nice money. Then he sold the home on 12th Street in Newark, 12th Street. And he bought another one near the park. You know where McGlorick [ph] section is?

LEVINE: No.

MITTELMAN: Well, we bought a home, a beautiful home. And my mother was so happy there. He used to come up, he saw us, Abe saw us twice, twice a week. And we had a beautiful home. We had a three-family home, and we had tenants downstairs.

LEVINE: And did he have, did he raise chickens?

MITTELMAN: Yeah. Then, then my uncle, may he rest in peace, came over to my father, said, "Let's buy, give up the home." A beautiful

home. I said, "Mama, don't do it." My father wanted her to give up the home to go partners on a farm, and we bought a farm, he gave up the home.

LEVINE: Where was the farm?

MITTELMAN: Gillette. Then we sold Gillette. I don't know what, we bought another one. I don't remember the other farm. That was bad. But in Gillette was beautiful, it was beautiful. That's where we got, she got, she got married, Lorraine got married before my older daughter, yeah. She can't come to see us. We were both sick, because her husband is going blind. My daughter's husband is going blind, and he can't drive the car, so I can't see my daughter. Beautiful. I got some family. I got a lot of problems in my old age.

LEVINE: What are you most satisfied about, your life?

MITTELMAN: This country, you mean?

LEVINE: Anything. This country, your life, what makes you feel happy when you think about it?

MITTELMAN: I was happy all the time here. Not here, I didn't want this apartment, because it rains it. You ought to see my other ceiling. But my husband and my daughter said, "That's good," so we both (?). But not long ago, about five years ago, I saw in the paper for senior citizen, (?). Four rooms.

LEVINE: What, tell me, when you think back over your whole life, what makes you feel satisfied? What makes you feel proud to have done?

MITTELMAN: Proud? That my mother was alive. I felt very proud.

LEVINE: What were you proud of? What made you proud?

MITTELMAN: Because I had food. I had a home. I had a father and I had a mother. What (?) mother would make you happy.

LEVINE: It sounds like you were both . . .

MITTELMAN: We were both wonderful parents.

LEVINE: Sounds like you were proud of the candy store, too.

MITTELMAN: Oh, yes. I loved the candy store, until the boys started to get, you know, they carried everything out. I used to send my husband to sleep in the afternoon, I took care of the candy store. So, naturally, I was busy making ice cream sodas, so they open up the door, took all the ice cream I had, a big case of ice cream near the door. They helped themselves. But, look, I never told them about it, because he used to get mad. "Why didn't you watch them?" I said, "You can't watch all the kids." But I didn't tell them everything. So they took some things. I was still happy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you, what do you think about coming to this country, being born in Poland? Do you think that affected you later in your life, the fact that you came here as an immigrant made a new life?

MITTELMAN: No. I loved it no matter where I was. I went to school and I met kids. I got a little older. I went to school, must have been about three years or so. Thirteen, fourteen. Sure.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MITTELMAN: I went to school about three, four years, until I got eighteen, I went into night school with my brother. I was happy. Then I went to work in a candy, in the five and ten. (voice off mike) I went to, I went to . . .

LEVINE: Your first job was the five and ten?

MITTELMAN: My first job was the five and ten.

LEVINE: What was that like?

MITTELMAN: Beautiful.

LEVINE: What did you like about it?

MITTELMAN: Because I could talk a little English, write a little English, and that's why I went to school. Beautiful. I went with my sister. She gave me that job. Then I, then my sister said to me, the one that died not long ago, "Oh, you don't want that job in the five and ten. You're not making much money. I work in a place where you make more money." I said, "What is that?" She says, "A candy factory." I went there. But, it was okay.

LEVINE: You liked the five and ten better.

MITTELMAN: Sure. You meet more people. You're only happy when you got people near you. You talk to them. My husband and I are very unhappy because we are both sick and we can't get out too much. Since my son-in-law died, she's got to do all the work in the store, so she can't come and take us out too much. I miss him terrible. I miss him. I'm sick from that. I'm really sick. My whole system is sick. Because he treated me like, you'd think I was a queen, her husband. He brought me the toaster

before he died. He bought everything for me. He bought me shoes.

LEVINE: Well, you're lucky to have had such a wonderful son-in-law.

MITTELMAN: The most wonderful, listen, I got another son-in-law. I love him, too. I hope he didn't go blind. I love him very much. I was talking to him yesterday on the telephone, yesterday, or the day before yesterday. And he says, "Mom, I wish I could see you, but I can't drive a car to come and see you." But when my son-in-law was alive, I wasn't so sick, because he used to bring me to the doctor's all the time, all the time. And I'm not, everything is the truth.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

MITTELMAN: If he was alive, I wouldn't be sick like this today. I'm all sick. I broke four ribs. I fell here about five, six years ago.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you can think about, think of, about, um, life in Poland?

MITTELMAN: I must have been young. We must have been, life in Poland, maybe, we had a nice home. That was maybe before my father went to this country. I don't remember.

LEVINE: And can you think about, um, any customs that you carry over from Poland, any ways that you have?

MITTELMAN: From the other side?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MITTELMAN: There's nothing to carry over, for all the misery. Everybody

was dying, and everybody was getting shot. We used to hide. I don't know where we used to hide. It was not good. My sister died, sure. She caught a sickness from my aunt.

LEVINE: And, so, did you become a citizen here?

MITTELMAN: Oh, sure. You become a citizen, I think, when you're underage.

LEVINE: Oh, on your father's.

MITTELMAN: Through marriage. Through marriage you became a citizen.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MITTELMAN: Yes. I was a citizen as soon as I come here, because I was young. My father was a citizen.

LEVINE: Okay.

MITTELMAN: My father, I don't know if you saw the pictures. Yeah.

LEVINE: I'm going to see them after. So is there anything else you'd like to say about your life here in America, before we close?

MITTELMAN: I was always happy in this country, always. As long as I had enough food that I, see, the people don't know, they went to Europe in the wartime, they'd come here and see how beautiful it is here. If you want to eat, you go to work. If you go to steal, then you don't get nothing. A lot of them want food, but they don't want to work in this country. As long as you want to work, it's a beautiful country.

LEVINE: Would you have any advice for immigrants who are coming into this country today?

MITTELMAN: The one that's coming in this country today, they have it good

on the other side, too, I think. I always wanted to go see Israel a little bit. So Abe and I always said some day we're going to visit Israel. I would like to see it. He got sick. He's been sickly. When he was well, we used to go to New York with the buses. You know, we had no car. We never knew how to drive. And we, the little bit, we enjoyed of this country. Not real ritzy. Everything, we saw a nice picture. We had enough food. What else can you be happy? But I had a dream, and I'm afraid to tell it. They wouldn't believe me. About my, my sister-in-law died of, what do you call, cancer, the young one. I have, I have three of them. I don't know that one is, I don't know where the other one is. The brother got killed, but they brought them over this country. But the one, she had pneumonia. She had cancer, but she took care of us. We had no rent. In this country, he didn't work. So we stayed there three years. But it's a funny thing, how I had a dream about her. Everything looked so real. I had the candy store, and this is the truth. I told one of my cousins, maybe they don't believe it, but I know what happened. He knows it. We had the candy store. All of a sudden a woman walks into the candy store. I looked at the woman, she looked just like my sister-in-law. And my husband was standing near the telephone taking care of the cards. So I thought maybe I always looked for a face like my sister-in-law. Maybe that's why I thought it was her. So she sat down by the counter, and she asked me for a soda. Seltzer or soda, I don't know. That's what she used to buy. And I looked at her. I couldn't believe it. So I walked over to my, to my husband by the telephone with about this much away from her. She started a, she was drinking soda. I went over to my husband. I said, "Abe, I don't want to say

nothing. I just want to ask you one question. When she turns around, I want you to look at that woman and tell me what she looks like." I didn't say, "I got somebody that looks like Ray," or something, no. "I want you to tell me who she looks like." He took a look. He said, "You know, that's Ray." That she died about, oh, maybe about seven years ago. She came into the candy store, and I got the chills from that. And she sat down. She said, "How do you feel?" I said, "All right." She didn't tell me she just moved in here, and she was talking to me. Something funny, I don't remember. And I walked back there, and she says, "I'm going, and some day I'm going to see you." But she didn't say where she came from. She didn't tell me if she moved. She just walked out, and that was the end. I never saw her again. And I told my, I told my niece about a year ago I told my niece what happened. And I think maybe she, no, it's hard to believe that.

LEVINE: This was a dream?

MITTELMAN: I don't know how she came. Where did she come from? She was dead about six, seven years. And she came in, she came in and saw she was talking to me. She says, "I'll see you someday."

LEVINE: Wow.

MITTELMAN: And she walked out, I never saw her come back in the store again. So now I'm wondering myself, why didn't she go to, her daughter was single yet. Her children were young. They were going to school. So now I know why she didn't go to see them first. Because they were single yet. She didn't know, maybe, where they lived. When she died, my sister-in-law, my niece, and the children were all single.

LEVINE: Was this soon after she died? Did this happen soon after Ray died?

MITTELMAN: Who?

LEVINE: Did this . . .

LORRAINE: This person that came in the store resembled my aunt very much, how people resemble each other.

LEVINE: It was soon after, soon after . . .

MITTELMAN: And I want to tell you, but that sister-in-law, there was no better woman. I got two more sister-in-law, I got one left now. She's all right. That's my, that's my brother that was born in this country, that he's my age, sixteen years. I'm not his age. I'm sixteen years older than her, sixteen older. He was born in this country. He wanted to be born in this country, Louie.

MITTELMAN: Oh, two brothers, why they came through Ellis Island.

LEVINE: I said to myself, I said, "Now I'm gonna have a, so she found out we didn't have no money." After we were married, my husband lost his job or something. She took me in the house. For three years we ate there and everything. The sister-in-law that died, the one that came to see me in the store. So I wondered why she didn't come, go to see her children. They weren't married yet. She don't know where they lived. But did you ever hear that? Every time I think of that I get a chill. She came to see me in the store. She meant good, maybe. We got along, much better than the, well, they're nice, too, but I don't see them often.

LEVINE: She was saying goodbye, maybe.

MITTELMAN: I lived in a poor neighborhood. Six, I remember like today.
Six, 16th Avenue, Abe?

ABE: Yeah.

MITTELMAN: I got a lot of friends poor. We're all poor, but we were
happy. I was young. If I didn't have no, like, if I had to go
for an operation, the woman, the Italian woman would bring down
meatballs and spaghetti, and she's supposed to go to my
daughter's wedding, Janici. She took, after I moved away from
16th Avenue, she came to me. I said, "Don't forget, you go to
come to Lorraine's wedding." She said, "Don't send me an
invitation. I know where it's gonna be." She never made it.
I had a lot of Italian friends, and Jewish. Everybody was
nice.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you had a nice life.

MITTELMAN: I had a nice home.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

MITTELMAN: After I bought home, I didn't buy a home yet, Clinton Place, I
bought a home, but we lost it. But then, uh, what happened?
Where did we move then? Oh, Lorraine. We went to Lorraine for
a while. Then we got another store, we got another candy
store. I helped everybody out. My aunt and uncle had a candy
store, so I knew how the business, so I used to help everybody.
I was happy to do it.

LEVINE: Okay. All right. Well, why don't we close here, unless

there's something else you'd like to say. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close off on the tape?

MITTELMAN: What?

LEVINE: Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

MITTELMAN: Oh, that's enough. A lot of bad memories, oh.

LEVINE: Well, you have some good ones, too.

MITTELMAN: Oh, I have, most was good in this country, of course. my father bought a beautiful home. He was so much in love with my mother. He bought her jewelry and everything. And he bought her, oh, he brought her friend along from the other side, too, a friend, a very close friend.

LEVINE: Oh.

MITTELMAN: Yeah. My father sent her. But I had two beautiful parents. My father lived, I think, about six years more than my mother, didn't he? Six years. He died. He missed my mother.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're going to close now.

MITTELMAN: They say everybody's got to have somebody. If you're single, you don't want to get married, but you got to have the companionship.

LEVINE: Well, you've got your . . .

MITTELMAN: You see how long, we're married a long time.

LEVINE: How long?

MITTELMAN: Well, if I'm going to be eighty, eighty-seven in August.

LEVINE: Sixty-four.

MITTELMAN: And my daughter is sixty-two, so, you know, I'm eighty-seven years old.

LEVINE: Sixty-four years, you've been married.

MITTELMAN: I was married, I think I was about, I got married, we kept, nowadays you get married one, two, three and divorced one, two, three. But years back you, I was married after, after two years. We went, kept steady company two years. But we didn't have a big wedding. We didn't have the money. Abe didn't work. But we worked in the candy store a long time, fifty years, and I loved it. I loved the candy store. There was people there. I like people.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's stop here. I've been talking with Thelma Mittelman. It's April 17th, and we're in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.