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IRVING GREEN (GRIN)
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LITHUANIA, 1920
AGE 19

SHIP: "THE SUSQUEHANNA"
PORT: DANZIG
RESIDENCES:
LITHUANIA: YELOK
US: NY, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Irving Green. Mr. Green came from Lithuania in 1920 when he was nineteen years old.

GREEN: Correct, that's right, yeah.

LEVINE: And today is, uh, June 20, 1994, no, the 19th, 1994, and Mr. Green is ninety-three years old at the time of this interview.

GREEN: Yeah, that's correct.

LEVINE: Well, I want to say that I'm delighted to have you here today, and I'm looking forward to your telling what seems to be a very interesting story. So why don't we start at the beginning. If you would give your birth date, and where you were born.

GREEN: Well, I have to start, because I'm very happy to be here today. [voice breaks] When I left Lithuania, it's a small village; there was nothing there, no nothing. We didn't have any telephones. Nothing, all - like I say -- in a country village. And then I had to go to this capital of Lithuania. It was Kovno. But when I came there, Lithuania was already an independent nation, and Kovno was already Kaunas, K-A-U-N-A-S, and for the capital of Lithuania. And Lithuania at that time was the only Baltic nation landlocked, so we couldn't leave by boat from there, so I had to go to Latvia, and I went from Latvia to Riga, the capital of Latvia, and I was familiar with the languages from Lithuania and Latvia. So I had no problem. Most of the people in Riga spoke Russian. They considered it quite another language.

But actually the government didn't like it. They wanted to bring back their own national language. That's, that's what we

expected. And this was a different story, Riga was a world-known city, and I came from a ti-- small town. So at the beginning it took a little while, and everybody seemed to be interested over there in opera. I went to see opera, too. I come, and I've never seen it, and I liked it very much. And from, when I got my visa over there, Latvia had no connection with Germany, or Lithuania had no connection at that time with Germany, but Latvia had by port. By sea. We went by -- I got a small boat, and he said he'll take me with my sister to Danzig, and from Danzig we can get a boat to the United States. So we went to Danzig, and we stopped over there in Neu(?) Hafen, we called it. That's in German, a new port. And over there I got off the boat. It was a different world entirely.

LEVINE: What was different?

GREEN: More modern over there. The telephone, you can go and you can talk, you can send a telegram, it was easier, everything was easier. And they told me they expected a boat that will come soon and they have two chimneys. I asked what are the two chimneys, they say it's safer because they're (?). That's what it was. And I had a check with me for three thousand German marks. I say German marks, because in Lithuania we had occupation marks, and Latvia had occupation rubles. So when I came to Latvia I had to change my Lithuanian occupation marks for Latvian rubles. (he laughs) And this took quite some time. Then somebody told me there is a small boat, when I'll get my visa, they'll take me to Danzig, because there wasn't any daily voyage between Danzig and Germany. There was not any. You are not safe here, they said.

So first someone told me there is a boat that may take me to Denmark. So I went to the Danish consul and I got a visa. They gave me the visas to everybody. When I came back, they told me here is a small boat. I should go to the port. There is a small boat that will take me to Danzig. So I wouldn't have to go stop off in Copenhagen, or whatever it was. So I did. They took me to the Kiel Canal. It was called, at that time they called it Kaiser Wilhelm Kanal. And when I came to Danzig it was a different country already. It was, at that time they had the Danzig corridor, and no one was popular, you know. They didn't, they didn't settle it yet.

You know, they cut Germany in half and they gave it a port to the Pollacks, to the Polish people. So someone told me he'll, I should come over there to the port with my sister, and pay for the trip. And if the Port Authority will come and take off and take me back, I shouldn't expect to get back what I paid in. So I took a chance, and they told me, "Don't try to hide anything. You have money?" I told him I have three thousand marks. I showed it to him. He says, "You have to show it to the port commander." So I went to the Riga Port Commander, he said the money has to be spent in Latvia. So I said, "How can I spend when I don't get, I have to -- a boat?"

He pulled over his soldier, he says, "I told you something, this is the way it will have to be. You have to spend the money here in Latvia." So I went back and I did something that may not been right. I went to a shoemaker. I had one pair of shoes, naturally. And I told him I go back for Lithuania, because during that time they killed, one of my, from my village was killed because they took away his

money and everything, and I was afraid to, they shouldn't do to me the same thing. So I put in the check in my shoes, and I went to the boat, and nobody bothered me, and I came to Danzig. In Danzig they told me, I cashed in the check over there. Because when I left they gave me a signed statement, everybody signed it, that I have a right to, the check was made out in my father's name, and my name was different. So they came with that I can't cash it. I went to a bank, and they cashed it for me.

And at that time the value of the German mark was higher than the, before they gave only ten marks for a dollar, but at that time, I don't know about, Germany had to pay reparations at that time, because the war was lost. I'm talking about the First World War. So when Hit-- Germany paid the reparations, the marks got (?). And then I sent a telegram to my brother here that I need more money, I didn't have enough. Three thousand marks wasn't enough. I had to spend for hotels. So he sent me the money, and I, that's what it is, and that's how I came to the United States.

LEVINE: Well. Well, before we talk about your actual coming here . . .

GREEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's talk a little bit about the village where you were born and where you lived.

GREEN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Up until you . . .

GREEN: I was born in the city, it was called Yelok.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

GREEN: Yelok. Y-E-L-O-K. When Germany beca-- when Lithuania became independent, they add the A-I. That was the same thing. Yelokai, they called it. That's it. There was nothing I didn't mention. The fact was, because small children used to go, when German occupation forces left, they left a telephone. So the telephone start to ring in the small city, we used to run and wait outside in order to hear the ring of the telephone. That was something. I said goodbye to the priest over there. He was very nice.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

GREEN: What?

LEVINE: Was your family religious?

GREEN: Yes, very religious. Over there there wasn't such a thing as no religious. Jews are, I was born in a Catholic country. When I left it was all right. No one was safe, but I know the priests knew what was

going on. They have a Catholic doctor, Dr. Karnetsky [ph]. He was all right. I don't know. It changed.

LEVINE: Um, what was your father's name?

GREEN: David, Dovid, Dovid yeah.

LEVINE: And your mother's name, and her maiden name?

GREEN: Toby. Toby.

LEVINE: T-O-B-Y?

GREEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was that her first name, or her maiden name? What was her name before she was married, her last name?

GREEN: Before she was married it was Lureir, Lureir. L-U-R-E-I, E-R, Lureir. Yeah.

LEVINE: And, um, you had, you had brothers and sisters?

GREEN: Yeah. We were seven brothers and four sisters. A stepbrother and a sister was included. My mother had seven brothers, seven sons and three sisters, and three daughters. So far I'm the only one left of the whole family.

LEVINE: Were you particularly close to any one family member?

GREEN: Yeah. we came here, we were very close. Stepsisters, the stepbrother was the one who served in the Russian army. He came here first. And we used to spell our name G-R-I-N. When he came here, they told him he should change it to Green. It easier. And he brought, the other sister, I was the last one to bring a brother here, the last brother. And my father and mother sold everything, their property, and they came here in the United States.

LEVINE: What was your life like in the Village? Did you go to school before you came?

GREEN: Oh, yes, we have school. You can't compare it to this, but I spoke, I was able to read and write the Russian language, and the Latin words, turn it over from the Russian language. Yeah. I spoke when I came here, Lithuanian, Latvian and Russian. And German I spoke -- something like the Jewish.

LEVINE: Did you speak Lithuanian at home?

GREEN: Yes, I can still feel it. I didn't forget, and I don't want to forget. It was my home. [breaking voice] I don't know - it happens. It changed. I don't know. I knew -- I knew the priest. A wonderful man. You know, we had some property, so there, one of the men was called in the, in the Russian army before, before the First World War One. So he said, "I didn't like the Jewish people." So she made a complaint that

my father is forcing her out because her husband ran away. So the priest went to the district court and tells, and he said he's going to tell the truth, and he tells the truth, and he never had the intention for throwing anybody out. He didn't even know about it that she can be thrown. And she is --. I don't know, but we were very friendly with the priest. He knew I was going away. In fact, when I was going to the train with my father and sister, and a man was driving the horses, he waved goodbye to me. He knew where I was going. I don't know, but times has changed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

GREEN: I wouldn't say anything bad about, the people in my village, I told, the priest we have say (?), maybe he wasn't alive any more. I don't know. That's what it is. When I came here in 1920, and Lithuania was occupied by the Germans, by Hitler, in 1943, so it's a different story.

LEVINE: Yeah. Um, as far as, uh, well, what did your father do for work in the village before he came here?

GREEN: We were buying all the, from the farmers, chicks, and we used to take them to the city in Latvia. Lebava, it was called, or Lebau, or Lepaya -- everyone has a different name. So we used to, that was our business. We used to buy the orchards from the farmers, and take the apples and take it through Lepaya. That's the one city that used to buy everything there. All the boats used to come there. Latvia had two, three port cities. The first was Lepaya. Latvians called it Lepoya, and the rest of the people call it Lepoya, or Lepaya -- this was different name. Then Riga. Riga was a different story already. And Lepaya, there was also a Russian naval base.

LEVINE: Do you remember, uh, did you help your father at all?

GREEN: Yeah, we helped. We were small boy. We used to be shake the tree and pick up the apples.

LEVINE: And then did you go to market with him? Did your brother . . .

GREEN: Yeah, we used to ta-- no, market we didn't go. We had to go to school, you know, certain days. And we stayed home, and my father used to take with the -- there were no automobiles. That's, no cars.

LEVINE: How did you get around?

GREEN: We had two horses. And that's what [not understood] . Everybody, only horse.

LEVINE: And did you, did each family have their own horses?

GREEN: Who?

LEVINE: Each family had . . .

GREEN: Most of them had, not every one, but most of them have. There were no cars. The first car we saw was about a half a year before the First World War started they announced that the governor general from, from Vilna, will visit our village. So that's the only time, when he came in, that was the only time, the first car we saw. And we called it different names. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind of names you called it?

GREEN: Automobilabil. We didn't know how to pronounce the name. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Did your family have any other livestock besides the horses?

GREEN: We have horses, and we have a cow, and sometimes we even have a goat, you know.

LEVINE: For milk, was that?

GREEN: Yeah, the milk, too, yes. The milk. And my mother used to work on, to make horseradish and coffee, sikhoya [ph], they used to call it. We used to plant it in our land, and we used to make it. My mother used to make butter. (he laughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have, did you grow a lot of vegetables?

GREEN: Yeah. We had gardens, we had farmland. In the city, we had only, I would say, a half. They called it a vesatim [ph], but we have half a vesatim [ph]. I don't know how many acres that would be, about three acres maybe. And further away we had five vesatims [ph]. So we had enough hay for the horses, and all we're gonna have to do, and most of them plant potatoes. Potatoes was the main item, the main food for everybody. They used to hide it in the ground for the winter. Not everybody could do it. They used to do it with straw, you know. And cover it, and in the spring we used to take it out. We have plenty to, for seed, planting there for us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember any dishes that your mother cooked?

GREEN: Oh, yeah, I remember.

LEVINE: Anything she liked in particular?

GREEN: I remember my wife much better about that. She tells her, yeah, there is. That's why, that was her whole life. She didn't complain, but the end was very bad, very bad.

LEVINE: Is there anything else, did you have grandparents who were alive and living near you?

GREEN: Grandparents, I had my old, my mother's gra-- uh, mother. She was, she passed away when we were forced to leave our villages.

Because they used to come in, and said, "The Jews have to leave the village."

LEVINE: When was that?

GREEN: That was at the beginning of the . . .

LEVINE: The First World War.

GREEN: The Second World War.

LEVINE: The First World War.

GREEN: The First World War, yeah. When we finally became independent, Latvian independent, so they told us there was no room for the Jews. Go here, go there. So they chased out, there was a Yeshiva seltels [ph]. This was called tells [ph]. Everybody in the Yeshiva was thrown out. I was supposed to go there, but it was too late. So they told us they'll, and every time they picked on the sabbath. The sabbath to us meant everything, and we had, we were forced to come to the marketplace with the horses and with the wagon and whatever we could take we should have, put it in there, and we'll be told where we'll be, where we'll be sent. So we did it. My mother's mother passed away just in the Jewish cemetery. It was awful. And then we stood there for four, five days, and the Germans took over. The Russian Cossack had to leave. They were forced, the Germans. The Germans took over our city. My city was taken over by the Germans when they put up a sign that they are Russian. (Russian) The City of Warsaw was falling. That day, our occupation was by the German Army, and the First World War started.

LEVINE: Now, what changes did that bring to the village, the occupation by the Germans?

GREEN: It brought a lot of changes.

LEVINE: What were they? Talk about it.

GREEN: First of all, we had nothing to do with the Germans, so they accused our people. They never said, the Germans, they always said, "Your Germans." And then they came in, and they wanted to -- first came in, the infantry, with the kitchen, field kitchen was not with them, so they were hungry, so they came to us. We say give them - they say -- we couldn't give them, because they'll make it non-kosher. So we told them the Cossacks did take away most of it. So they went around, looked in the oven, you know, and they found the dishes, and took it out, and that's the way it is. So, or otherwise we had to take them to a farm. When the Germans came to your farm, they were a different tsoris [trouble], was nothing like Russians.

First of all, they wanted to see the horses. See, the farmers were immediately better. We were -- it wasn't my fault. They wanted something to eat, so I took them to a farm. And they had, but now (?) they were different. They wanted to know what -- how does he live, how many cows he has, how many, whatever he has. And then when they had

to, when the Cossacks attacked, they had to leave, so they went and took these horses. And because there was no paved roads like you know over here, so the heavy army trucks sank, the Germans, sank in the mud. So they needed the horses, they needed the horses to take it out. So they went to the farm. So who brought the far—who brought the Germans to the farm? Me, I did. So, you see, it was a very bad situation. I mean, I couldn't convince him that it's not my fault or anybody's fault. You see, even when the Cossacks came, and they went to a farm, they didn't care -- they went to eat. They ate and they went. But the Germans wanted to know how everything is going, how many horses, how many.

LEVINE: So you only knew . . .

GREEN: So they blame the Jewish --. It was very bad. And you can't blame a farmer. When you go, the Germans took away his horses. He's a dead farmer. That's what it is. So the situation was very bad. That's all I remember. When I left there, they were all my friends. I like it. They knew that I'm leaving.

LEVINE: How was it decided that you would leave? How was it decided? How did it come about that you would leave?

GREEN: I have here my fa—my brothers, and he wanted to, the brothers, I'm supposed to come to the same thing the other brother brought him. And he brought me, and I came here, and I brought my brother. And then we decided we should bring father and mother and everybody else. So they came, and they brought two younger brothers, the younger ones.

LEVINE: So who traveled with you when you left?

GREEN: My sister, one sister.

LEVINE: What was your sister's name?

GREEN: My sister's name was Beatrice. The Jewish name was Brayna. She had a very sad life. She had a four-year-old boy and later she got married, and he got infantile paralysis, and he still has it. He's in the United States, but very bad.

LEVINE: Well, when it was one of your brothers who sent you the money for you and your sister to come over?

GREEN: Yes. Not the only ones. There were sisters before, and brothers, so they contribute whatever they could.

LEVINE: I see. I see.

GREEN: That's the way we came.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you knew about America before you came here? What, what had you heard?

GREEN: It was a (?), yeah. In fact, when I came here, I became a citizen. I wanted to visit. So I'm glad I didn't go, because at that time the Germans just took over the whole country, and they (?) with the rest of them. So I didn't have, I had a hundred and fifty dollars saved, so I thought I'll make it. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. What about leaving? How did you feel? Did you, how did you feel? Do you remember how you felt when you were getting ready to leave, and you were actually . . .

GREEN: I came to America?

LEVINE: Yeah.

GREEN: It was a different story. First of all, I had to live with my, with my brother. He lived a walkup, five floors. And he had a small room, a small three bedroom. It was facing the Williamsburg Bridge, Bridge Plaza, they called it. And I came there with my sister. I slept here, my sister over there. And then my brother took my sister to work. She finally got a job. So she took along sour cream, you know, for lunch. So he spilled it in the subway. And I used to live on Moore Street in Williamsburg. I don't know if you know that place. Oh, boy, that was awful.

LEVINE: Well, um, tell me first about the, uh, the ship. Now, you finally got aboard ship, and . . .

GREEN: Yeah, I got, but it was a troop ship.

LEVINE: And what was the name of it? Do you remember?

GREEN: Susquehanna, New York. United States Maiden Steamship Company. They told me it had two chimneys and it would be safe. It's better to wait, he told me. So I waited. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So you waited for one with more chimneys?

GREEN: For a, for the boat. Because he said it's a bigger ship, and it would be easier to go. And I was, at that time already advancing. Not in Latvia. I was out of Latvia. So I waited there, and I got on the boat. I kept jumping, going down and down. (he laughs) But it's all right. I knew I'm goin'. (?) I can't complain about it.

LEVINE: Did you have any experiences aboard ship that you remember?

GREEN: Yeah. I came to Danzig by boat. I came from the Baltic by boat. And then I was in Danzig already. I went through the Kiel Canal.

LEVINE: And on the Susquehanna, crossing the Atlantic, do you remember anything that happened on ship?

GREEN: No. We had, uh, one, one room was the dining room, and that's it. You see, every day was the best way I knew I'm leaving. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And, um, were you working before you left for America?

GREEN: Yes. I was a salesman in a store, a shoe store. (he laughs) That's why I say, I don't want to forget Lithuanian. I spoke Lithuanian almost just as much as Jewish, Hebrew. I enjoy it. (?)

LEVINE: Did you have any idea of what you would do when you got to America?

GREEN: No. I knew that my brothers was in the fur trade, so I knew that they'll take me, they took me in. I went to a business—a man of my village. He says, "Oh, your brother's a furrier. You have to be a furrier." Why? (he laughs) That's the way it is.

LEVINE: So do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

GREEN: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

GREEN: It came in at night. That's what it is.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GREEN: And everybody thought, "I'll slide down the rope." It started to turn. But it was nice. I was on the boat about six days, because we had a lot of boats ahead of -- (?) ahead of me. So we had to be on the boat, and then my brother came, and the friends and they sent up oranges, you know, we brought it up from there, with the rope from--.

LEVINE: So you had to stay on the ship in the New York Harbor for six days after you made the voyage.

GREEN: Yes, that's correct.

LEVINE: Because there were so many ships coming into Ellis Island.

GREEN: Yeah. They were ahead of us, so we had to wait, because it takes time to process the immigrants and everything.

LEVINE: So your brother would come along on a little boat, and pass things up on the rope.

GREEN: Yes, my brother and sisters, too. (he is moved) It was all right. You see, my father came. He didn't know that one of my brothers is dead already. So he kept on asking. Akh.

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, your father didn't come until later.

GREEN: Yeah. No, the father came, yeah.

LEVINE: After you.

GREEN: I came before, I came before.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well . . .

GREEN: My father and mother came, and two brothers, and they didn't have any more anybody over there.

LEVINE: Left, uh-huh. Well, tell me, um, when you finally, when the boat did dock and you took probably a smaller boat to Ellis Island, do you remember your impressions of Ellis Island then?

GREEN: I did. I came in, and they told me, someone tell me the stories there. I remember standing here, and he said, he called me over and he told me to read. So I read. He says, "That's enough." (he laughs)

LEVINE: So you read all right.

GREEN: Yeah. He tells me, it was a nice welcome. I didn't expect.

LEVINE: You read in Lithuanian?

GREEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that how, what language were you reading in?

GREEN: Jewish.

LEVINE: In Jewish. Uh-huh.

GREEN: I could speak, I could read Russian, Lithuanian, too. But he gave me that, like. I told him, when I came in on the boat, from the boat I got a room in Moore Street, Brooklyn. I don't know if you know where it is.

LEVINE: Wait. Before we talk about Brooklyn, just tell me about Ellis Island. Were you examined there? Do you remember examinations?

GREEN: I don't think I was examined by a doctor. I didn't. I wasn't. No, I don't think--.

LEVINE: And how long did you have to stay here?

GREEN: In Ellis Island? I was on the boat all the time. So when I came here and he took me in in the room, they were ready already to release me. There was a man to accept me, a cousin. I didn't know him - - a young man, he was a young lawyer, and he took me over, and then that's it. I didn't have no problem.

LEVINE: But you didn't know this cousin.

GREEN: What?

LEVINE: You didn't know the cousin?

GREEN: I didn't know him. I know his father and mother.

LEVINE: I see.

GREEN: They were my father's brother -- sister. His mother was my father's sister.

LEVINE: Okay. I think we'll pause here so that Peter can turn over the tape, and then we'll continue.

GREEN: All right. I got time.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING

OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now on Side Two. We were talking about when your cousin came to Ellis Island.

GREEN: Yes.

LEVINE: And you knew his mother and father.

GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you met him. How did you recognize him?

GREEN: He - he came for - he came for me. He told me that his name is Clarence (?). So I knew that-- . 'Cause my, when they came, they sent up to me the oranges and certain items, so there was an article, this gentleman would come to meet me. He'll come with his wife. He was just young, married, and they came together, and that's the way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then what? Once you met with that cousin, where did you go from there?

GREEN: I go with him to, I think, he took me over to my brother, or my brother was waiting for me somewhere after he took me off from the island. This I don't remember.

LEVINE: To Brooklyn.

GREEN: Yeah. My brother lived in Williamsburg, right near the Williamsburg Bridge.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember how you, how you, what transportation you took to get to, um . . .

GREEN: Yeah. I used to go -- I had to take the Broadway local to Canal Street and walk through Canal Street and take a train to the Broadway line. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What was it like seeing the subway?

GREEN: 28th Street. At that time we had the Second Avenue, uh . . .

LEVINE: Elevated.

GREEN: Elevator, yeah.

LEVINE: What was it like seeing the subway for the first time?

GREEN: The first time it was interesting. (he laughs) To go to, to go to work I had to walk up one stairs, and go downstairs, and go through Canal Street. That was a different story.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you went to the apartment of your brother, which was a small room.

GREEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So it was your brother, your sister and you -- were staying there at first.

GREEN: Yeah. My brother was married.

LEVINE: Oh, and your brother's wife.

GREEN: His wife, and a small baby, too.

LEVINE: Oh, and a baby.

GREEN: It was very tight. They didn't have a room. So they got for me a room in, in Wall Street. Over there a lady who knew my father and knew me from Europe, so I, when I used to go to work there at night, I used to have supper over there. And over there I met a few more the same like me. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

GREEN: I met there two of my, from my village. They were both in the United States Army, the First World War. And it came to Verdun, Germany. Over there they had a very serious battle. So it just happened that one of them was sent from here to connect the telephone, and the other one was sent from there. They didn't know -- one didn't know of the other that he's in the army over here or over there. And over there they met. (they laugh) One was (?), the other one was (?). Oh, they say start to scream. (he laughs) (?) bombardments with the Germans.

LEVINE: Did you try to, um, to meet up and to socialize with other people from Lithuania?

GREEN: Yeah, yeah. I joined to certain -- like the Workers Circle. They were good. When I was married, I married. For my children. And I became a member of the Furrier's Union.

LEVINE: So you, you took a job with your brother in the fur . . .

GREEN: Yeah. He got a job for me. I worked three weeks for nothing.

LEVINE: To learn?

GREEN: I learn the trade, yeah. And after I learn the trade, he paid me fifteen dollars a week. So I got a room, eight dollars a month. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was life . . .

GREEN: And three dollars a week for the suppers at night.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GREEN: And then for a quarter I got a plate of soup and a roll for lunch. (he laughs) That I remember.

LEVINE: Do you . . .

GREEN: It was, at least I was in a place.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that were new to you when you came to America, things that you had never seen or heard before?

GREEN: Everything was new. Everything, everything.

LEVINE: Anything that struck you in particular?

GREEN: I came up, first time I said that I'm from Lithuania, they told me to spell Lithuania. (he laughs) 'Cause my brother, all of -- they all said Russia. I didn't want to say of the Russia any more. I put down under the table in my room, a small (?) like this, green, citizen of Lithuania. [not understood] I forgot -- how Lithuania citizen I marked that. I don't-- you know.

LEVINE: So, so, um, how long did you work with the furriers.

GREEN: With my brother?

LEVINE: Yeah.

GREEN: I worked about six months, and then I went to a different place, the same line, a furrier.

LEVINE: Was that your career, working in fur?

GREEN: Yeah. I worked career - I worked about forty-nine years on it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did you meet your wife?

GREEN: (he laughs) Somebody told me, oh, yes. You know, there was, when I came here there was all kind of languages. So someone told-- I used to ask someone in Lithuanian, he says that I -- if you understand, suprantu. In Latvian 'you understand', you say suprant. But it just happened that there was a man that wanted to produce one world language, and it was supposed to be called Esperantu. So supronto - supronto. He came over to me, "You speak Esperantu?" I said no. (he laughs) So someone told me there were three girls that speak only Hebrew. So I told him I want to meet them. So I met my wife. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Where, where were you when you met her? Where did you meet her?

GREEN: I met her at my fa-I -- I was, I used to go to - to have supper in a certain place. So they told me, there was another man that was also for that purpose. I said there are three girls that speak only Hebrew. (he laughs) And I happen to say another one -- suprantu, you know Lithuanian -- suprantu. Supra. So they thought I am talking Esperantu. I don't know if you heard about it.

LEVINE: Yes.

GREEN: There was supposed to be one language in the world.

LEVINE: Yeah.

GREEN: He got lost. There was another cit-- Lithuanian complained that she was the only landlocked country Baltic republic. And finally there was a city in Germany, it was called Ostpreussen. That part of Lith-- of the Baltic, was called Ostpreussian. Prussia, you know, there was, Kaiser Wilhelm was the emperor of Prussia. So when he went to Holland to take a rest, so (?) was available for the Lithuanians, so they took it over, and Lithuania - Memel became, it's a different name already. It's no more Lith-no more Memel. Klaipedus today is Lithuania. So Lithuania has -- is no longer land-locked. So that's, everything has changed.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, um, after you got married, then where did you live?

GREEN: Where I work, or I live?

LEVINE: Live.

GREEN: I got a, the first, I think we were, we lived in, uh, in, what is the place? I should know. I lived there about twenty-one years, and I forgot already. It's on Boston Road, near Gun Hill Road. There is also something like Co-op City.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So in the Bronx.

GREEN: I forgot that. I forgot the name.

LEVINE: This is in the Bronx?

GREEN: What?

LEVINE: In the Bronx?

GREEN: No, no, no. It's a different city. I think it's something with a V -- something. My - my wife will remind me.

LEVINE: Okay. So how, and then how many children did you have?

GREEN: I have two children. I have a son and a daughter. My son is married, son and two daughters.

LEVINE: And what's your son's name and your daughter's name?

GREEN: My son's name is Melvin Green, and my daughter's name is Doris Whitehouse. She lives in Worcester, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: So what would you say, how do you think you changed?

GREEN: I changed.

LEVINE: I mean, you were nineteen years old when you came here.

GREEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And after you were here a while . . .

GREEN: Now I'm an old man. (they laugh)

LEVINE: After you were here a while, do you think you changed a lot living here in America?

GREEN: Everything is.

LEVINE: In what ways?

GREEN: When I came to live in Co-op City, I was already sixty-nine years.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh. Yeah. What are you most proud of that you did in your lifetime?

GREEN: Well, I'm proud I have a nice family, a nice wife. I'm sitting here, I'm proud, too.

LEVINE: Was it difficult learning English? How did you come to learn English?

GREEN: I went to night school. I tried to read a lot. I had time. In my trade, they didn't work too long. I was on strike more than at work. (laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

GREEN: We were the first to get the forty hours week, and the thirty-five hours week. In the end we got nothing.

LEVINE: Were you active in the union?

GREEN: I was a member of the union, yeah, I was a shop chairman. I doesn't, it didn't mean anything. Because you always have the problem with the workers, with the strikes. Right and left, I don't know if you heard about the Communists.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. What, when you think about yourself as being Lithuanian and also American, can you say what part of you is Lithuanian and what part American? Could you say anything about . . .

GREEN: I'm all-part American.

LEVINE: You're all American.

GREEN: The most productive years I was here. All right, I grew up in Lithuania, that's true. People who come here now Lithuania, it's nothing there, the same thing. They suffer, they all expect to move here or here or Israel, or here or there.

LEVINE: Do you think you have any traditions or customs or ways of doing things that you learned when you were living in Lithuania. Ways that you have today?

GREEN: I and my people and everything, we were -- it had to be honest. I know, I was a salesman in a store. So one time a woman came in and left a small packet like this. So I put it away over here in the (?), I said, "(?), you lost." I said, " So here it is." So they knew already that - that I'm honest. She came in a second time with the same thing, she kept on losing, and she wasn't in my store so--. That's the way. I got along very well with them in the store and everything.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father adjust to being in America? Did they like it here?

GREEN: Yes. My mother came like this, she couldn't write, she went to night school. She learned how to write, and she became a citizen. And then she passed away, she was eighty years. (he is moved) What a change she had. You know, we had in Europe, we had a big kitchen, and we didn't have any sink water, you know. There wasn't any, you had to bring in a pail of water, and here she came in. (he laughs) And we had a ba-- bathroom in the hall. I used to put in a bulb every night. When I went to work and I came back, there was no light. Yeah.

LEVINE: So conditions were a lot better here for her, or not as good?

GREEN: Oh, yeah. You can't compare it. The people didn't know where there is -- saw a light. And I suppose the next time they get -- someone else took it out, so they took it out, too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

GREEN: We had that in Brooklyn. We used to live in Union City. There was a lot of public bath, because we didn't have any bathhouse, any baths in the small rooms. For fifty cents they used to give us a towel and soap, and that was very nice. Especially in the summertime it was very good, when we used to come from work.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

GREEN: No complaints. What's the use.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of that has to do with your coming to this country and living out most of your life here?

GREEN: Yeah. I see what it is. I have a nice home. I -- I've got a nice wife. Thanks God I have a good family, my sons. What can I expect any more? According to the education I have, that's the way it is.

LEVINE: And what about this phase of your life, this phase of your life, old-age phase? How is that for you?

GREEN: It's, I really don't know. I'm not going out too much, because I can't do it any more. I used to walk miles. I used to walk from here to, you know, to Einstein Hospital and Montefiore, sometimes I had to go. But now I couldn't do it. That's bad. I have to stay. I'm (?). (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay. And so, um, how do you feel coming back here today? How does it seem to come back to Ellis Island?

GREEN: It feels all right.

LEVINE: Yeah?

GREEN: I'm happy. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close?

GREEN: I really don't know what. I have no complaints. That's my life. That's what I made of myself, and that's what I think.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow. I want to thank you very much.

GREEN: I thank you very much.

LEVINE: It's been a pleasure talking with you.

GREEN: It's very nice of you to take your time and come (?).

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Well, I've been talking with Norman Green. It's June 19, 1994, and we're here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio,

and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

EI-479/GREEN