EI-517
SAMUEL ROSEN
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RUSSIA, 1930
AGE 15

SHIP: "THE PIRAEUS"
PORT:
RESIDENCES:
RUSSIA: BALTA, UKRAINE
RUMANIA:
ISRAEL: TEL AVIV
US: NEW YORK, FARMINGDALE LI, NY

LEVINE: Today is August 3, 1994, and this is Janet Levine. I'm here in North Bellmore, Long Island, New York, with Mr. Samuel Rosen, who was born in Russia in 1915. He escaped to Rumania in 1920, hoped to come to the United States in 1925, but because of the installation of the quotas had, could not come to the United States and went instead to Israel. But in 1930 he and his father and mother and brother came to the United States via Ellis Island. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I want to say I'm very happy to be here, and I'm looking forward to hearing everything you can remember about your story.

ROSEN: Thank you very much for the introduction.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's start, if you could say your birth date for the tape.

ROSEN: I, I was born on May 1, 1915.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

ROSEN: I was born at a small city called, uh, Balta, B-A-L-T-A, which is right outside of Odessa in Russia.

LEVINE: And did you live in Balta until 1920?

ROSEN: That's right.

LEVINE: Now, do you have any memories of Balta?

ROSEN: Yes. I have a memory, I have a lot of memories of Balta. First place, the living conditions for Jewish people in Balta wasn't very good. There was a lot of anti-Semitism. The, uh, the shkutzim, which is the word we use for Gentiles, the young boys, would torment us, and would tease us. Made live very unbearable. We lived in a small community, which was like a farm. We had about six or eight houses in a circle, and that was our, uh, nucleus. My father worked as a, uh, salesman in a clothing factory and my mother, of course, was a homemaker. Uh . . .

LEVINE: Was the clothing factory in Odessa, or was it . . .

ROSEN: Uh, they had a factory right outside Odessa, in Balta. Balta was a very big small town. Not as big as Odessa, but it was a very good town to live in. And we had a grocery store, we had whatever needs, grocery store, we had, uh, a farm market where we bought produce, uh, a kosher butcher, and that's how life went on. But, of course, I was five years old.

LEVINE: Right. What was your father's name?

ROSEN: Harry, Hershel.

LEVINE: And your mother?

ROSEN: Leah.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

ROSEN: Kushnir.

LEVINE: K . . .

ROSEN: U-S-H-N-I-R. She had—she came from a very large family. She had six brothers and two sisters.

LEVINE: And were they also in . . .

ROSEN: They're all in, uh, in Russia. None of them ever emigrated, and most of them perished during the Revolution. We, my mother kept in touch with them all the time. My mother had one brother who lived in Tel Aviv. The rest all lived in Russia.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents?

ROSEN: Yes. I had a – had a zeydi and a babi.

LEVINE: Do you remember them at all?

ROSEN: Yes, I remember my zeydi. My -- every time we used to, we see a movie here where they depict the old czarist Russia, he looked like the czar. He had a beard and a moustache, and very distinguished looking man. I remember him very well.

LEVINE: Uh, what, now, what were your, what was he doing for work?

ROSEN: Uh, well, I really don't recall what he was doing, but he was, uh, well, he did a little dabbling in writing. He, he wrote in Russia, in Russian. And, uh, I really don't know what is, uh, where he made his livelihood, but he managed very well. And my bubi I remember very well, with the sheytel [wig] and with the kerchief, and with the long dresses and grandmotherly type of garb.

LEVINE: Do you remember the, uh, observance of religious holidays?

ROSEN: Yes. We, we were not a religious, all through life, we were not very observant. I was conscious of being Jewish. The holy holidays we always observed. But we didn't, uh, deprive ourselves on the Sabbath. Of course, we didn't have cars. We had wagons at that time. We did not, uh, observe the holiday, uh, very strictly.

LEVINE: And what, would you say that it was an equal proportion of Jewish people and Gentiles?

ROSEN: Oh, no, it was a very small minority. Jewish people were a small minority. As a matter of fact, I remember one instance. I must have been three or four years old. There was a lot of, uh, fighting going on during the Revolution, you know? And one day I asked my mother, you know what a sound, a sewing machine makes? Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta. One day early in the morning I asked my mother, "Why are they using a sewing machine so early in the morning." She says, "That's not sewing machines, my boy. That's machine guns being used." And there was a war going on right, all around us. We sta-- stayed sequestered in our houses, we never went out, and we really had a tough time, uh, when I was about four years old, 1919.

And we started to make plans to escape, and we finally were able to escape. We crossed the river into Rumania. Ma—my-- my father had a brother living in Rumania, so he made arrangements for us to cross over. We crossed over in a, we crossed, I had to cross a river, which was quite wide. We crossed, not on a regular boat, but in a trough that was feeding pigs. But it was waterproof. So my mother, my father and I, and the farmer who drove us across, we crossed that, at night, late at night, but, we were very lucky, we were able to see, because it was a full moon. It was planned that way. And we crossed into Rumania. We stayed in Rumania.

That morning my father's brother came, because he made all the arrangements, and we were, we got into a wagon, and we were, it was a hay wagon, and we were laying, the three of us were laying under the hay, covered with hay. But me, at five years old, I was curious. I wanted to know where we were going and where we were coming from. So I raised my head above the hay. The driver says, "Keep your head down, because we're not in Rumania yet. We're still in Russia and, uh, you have to be very, very careful because the least suspicion, you'll be picked up." And we were able to cross into Rumania. I'll never forget the day, because it was Passover.

And my, my uncle, the house was very kosher, and the house was ready for Passover because it was the first night of the Seder. They were so kosher that they did not want us to stay in the main house because we were not kosher. We were not kosher for Passover. So they had a big porch, like a patio, an enclosed patio. It was during the wintertime. And we stayed out on the patio, the three of us, right next to the living room. And they brought us food. They brought a big samovar. So we had tea constantly, and that's how we were welcomed into Rumania on Passover Eve.

LEVINE: Wow. What was the ri-- .

ROSEN: [interposed] And I remember that, because I couldn't remember -- why wouldn't they let us stay in the main house. And to this day, oh, we, I always discussed it with my mother and my children and my grandchildren, and I have a lot of relations. They always liked to hear the story of the crossing of the river, and I always told it to them. That's why they encouraged me, "Why don't you write it down, and – and – and tell the world about it." I says, "Who would buy it?" Of course, the standard joke was you – you write a book, you want it to sell, you have to have a little intrigue, you have to have a little sex in it, you know? So . . . (he laughs)

LEVINE: What river were you crossing?

ROSEN: I don't remember the name of the river. As a matter of fact, when I was thinking last night of the incident, I was going to look it up on a map, but I don't have a map. But as – as –as – as – as coincidences carry, something happened to my life since I'm here. One of my daughters is very religious. She lives, she married a – a very religious man who had five children whose, uh, wife died. She was a friend of the woman who died, of the mother. And, uh, my son-in-law, my now son-in-law, at that time knew that Brocha, who was the women that died, knew Deborah because they both lived in Israel in a kibbutz. When his wife died, he got in touch with my daughter who lived here in Monsey, New York, in very religious quarters, and he proposed to her on the telephone, and he said, "I'll come over here, and I'll meet your parents and see what will come out of it." So he made, he came here by plane, he met my daughter, he met my wife. My wife is deceased, by the way, nine years. And, uh, it was love at first sight. He's a French, there's another story here, and I don't know if I should go into that story at this point.

LEVINE: Well, I'm thinking maybe, chronologically, we'll go along what happened when you got to Rumania.

ROSEN: Yes, and then I'll get back. The only reason I mentioned that is because my son-in-law, who's very religious, is a follower -- not of the Satmars, of the Lubavichers -- but he's a follower of a religious sect in Russia. And lived, the religious man lived in Uman, and my son-in-law and a group of Hasidim, about twenty, with their children, go to Uman every year to commemorate his birth, and Uman is right outside of Balta, and right outside of, uh . . .

LEVINE: Odessa.

ROSEN: Odessa. That's why I – I – I brought in him. But, of course, I'll tell you a story about him later, because I'll show you some of his works. He's a world renowned artist. And I'll show you his work, and I'll show you what he's doing, and they still live in Europe. And that, that's just on the side. But the coincidence is that he went to Uman which is right outside of Odessa.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, good. Okay. Well, let's say, now, you, you went to your uncle's house.

ROSEN: Yes, we went to Rumania.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ROSEN: And, uh, they got my father a job to work in a furniture factory, a furniture showroom, and we stayed in Rumania for five years.

LEVINE: Were you living with your uncle?

ROSEN: No, we had our own apartment, and my father made a living working in a furniture factory. Oh, it was a factory showroom combination. He was not a mechanic. He was just a salesman. And Rumania my second, my brother was born. I had a brother who was born in Rumania. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: What do you remember about life in Rumania?

ROSEN: Rumania was also a very tough, Rumania was also very anti-Semitic. It may be a state of mind. It m—may – it may not be all true, but we all had the same feeling that we're not, we weren't happy there. And, uh, and, uh, Easters and New Year's Day and Christmas, the anti-Semitism became alive. And they did everything they could to torment us, that the Jews killed Jesus Christ and we've got to get even with the Jews for that. And that was a very unhappy feeling. I was ten years old when we left Rumania, and I used to complain to my mother, I says, "Why are they doing this to us?" And my mother says, "That's the way they are. They -- they're used to picking on Jews. Jews are an easy target, and it's a – it's a way of life for them." And we were very unhappy. And my mother corresponded with her brother all the time, and, uh, we told them that we're coming to America. We have all intentions of coming, we prepared the visas, we had everything ready.

LEVINE: And it was because of, the anti-Semitism was the main thing.

ROSEN: Oh, yes. I – I -- even as a child of ten years old, I – I realized what was going on.

LEVINE: How about on a one-to-one basis. Were you friends with any of the . . .

ROSEN: We never had a, no, I never had any, uh, any Gentile friends.

LEVINE: No.

ROSEN: We had a small community again. We all, we lived like a small ghetto. It was a few families. I had, uh, my cousin lived there, too. My father's cousin lived. And, uh, he and I went, we had a tutor to study Hebrew. We studied Hebrew, two of us. My cousin's still alive, he's in New Orleans. And we, every time we see each other, we don't see each other too frequently, but whenever we see each other, we remember the Melamed we had who was teaching us Hebrew.

LEVINE: Now, um, you weren't a particularly religious family, but you were a culturally . . .

ROSEN: We were very aware of our Jewishness, sure. I started to read, to, uh, a little writing of Hebrew. And when we went to synagogue I knew how to pray, because I knew how to read Hebrew. I didn't understand every word, but I understood most of it.

LEVINE: Did you, uh, go to school as well, or it was strictly the tutoring?

ROSEN: I, in, uh, in – in Rumania, I did not go to school. We had a private tutor. And, uh, that's how we learned. But, of course, in fifteen years until we came to the United States, I had to go through three different languages. Russian was my native language. We came to Rumania, I learned how to speak Rumanian. We came to Israel, I learned how to speak and write Hebrew. There I went to school. We were -- I was ready to go to the Gymnasia Herzalea in Tel Aviv, which is the famous gymnasia there. But, of course, my father and mother decided that we want to go back, we want to go, our original plans, all our relatives were here.

And, of course, we had, during the 1929 riots, the Arabs were rioting in Israel in 1929. That was the year that forty Hasidic students were killed in Hebron. We lived in Tel Aviv, right on the border of Jaffa, and Jaffa was an Arab city, and the main road led from Jaffa to Tel Aviv where we lived on Hollingby Street right by the, right by the ocean, and we had to fight them off. We didn't have guns, we didn't have any ammunition, so, you know, I'll never forget. We stood on the border waiting the Arabs to come, with sticks. Of course, fortunate for us, they never came. So, we don't know what would have happened. But that was the reason where my mother says, "Let's try again. Let's get away from here." And we picked up, and we came here.

LEVINE: Was there any particular incident that led to your leaving Rumania for . . .

ROSEN: Rumania we never liked. Rumania was just like a stepping stone.

LEVINE: I see.

ROSEN: From Rumania we planned to come to the United States. But since we were stopped, we decided to go and live in Tel Aviv with my mother's brother.

LEVINE: Do you remember that trip?

ROSEN: Yes, I remember the trip. I remember that from Rumania we took a boat, a Greeks boat. It was a freighter. The trip took about three days, and we picked up the boat in Athens, Greece and we sailed across the ocean. It was a very rough voyage. And we came to, uh, Israel. Israel, at that time, did not have a formal port, so we had to stop the boat a couple of miles away from Tel Aviv, and we were loaded into, uh, boats, and little, little small, uh, hand, hand propelled boats, and we landed in Tel Aviv. First thing I remember when we landed in Tel Aviv is that we had to go to quarantine, and we're all given special baths, make sure that we don't have any, uh, diseases or so forth. And I'll never forget the bath. It was like taking a bath in lye. It was, it wasn't very sweet-smelling, but that, the Israeli, it wasn't Israeli at that time. At that time it was Palestine, and we were, Palestine was a mandate of, uh, Great Britain, and we had to live under the, uh, supervision and, it was their country. We were just, we were just, uh, you know, I don't know what the word to use, but we lived there, we were immigrants. But we stayed in Tel Aviv, which was an all Jewish city. I went to school in Tel-Aviv – I went to public school.

LEVINE: Was it a, was it a great change?

ROSEN: Oh, yes. I wo-- I loved Israel. As a matter of fact, one of the things I always recall is that we made a lot of friends in a community that we lived in Tel Aviv. Have you ever been to Tel Aviv?

LEVINE: No, I haven't.

ROSEN: All right. It was a very nice community. We lived in small, like a, it was like a shanty town. And, uh, the houses were made out of tin, corrugated tin like we had over here during, right after the war. And every time it rained you can hear the, the rain, and we lived in a nice community. I loved, I loved Israel. I didn't want to leave. I did not want to leave, because I made a lot of friends, and, all Jewish friends, and we, I really enjoyed Israel very much.

LEVINE: Well, you were there, what, from the age of . . .

ROSEN: From ten to fifteen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ROSEN: Five years we were there. I learned the language fluently. I spoke very well. I wrote. And I registered, as I said before, in a gymnasia, ready to go to high school. But, of course, my parents decided to come here. So we got on another Greek steamer. It took us almost ten days to come to the United States.

LEVINE: Do you know why your parents wanted to, even though they had originally planned to come here, why they didn't want to settle in . . .

ROSEN: They originally, they loved Israel but, again, all my mother's, my mother's relatives, not my father's, all are here in the United States. Not close relatives. Uncles and aunts, and they wanted us to come to the Goldene Medina, like the saying goes. And I did not want to uproot, because I made a lot of good friends there, and I really loved it. As a matter of fact, at fifteen years old, when we left, I had a girlfriend. And we corresponded for about a year and then, of course, forget the, forget, you know, out of sight, out of mind, out of sight.

LEVINE: So, uh, do you remember getting ready to come to the United States?

ROSEN: I remember we did not travel very heavily. We did not have too much luggage. Of course, one thing I wanted to bring with me, and my mother says, "It's foolish to carry it," was a beach chair. In Tel Aviv we lived right by the beach, and everybody goes to the beach in the special folding beach chairs. I'll never forget, we took a, I made him take it for me, and when we got to America, and my cousin came and picked us all up, she says, "What are you doing with a beach chair?" I says, "That's my favorite beach chair, and if we ever go to the beach, do we have a beach in New York?" She says, "Sure."

Okay. But it was the old fashioned type of beach chair, and I'll never forget, when we got on the train, we got, we, uh, in New York, we, from Ellis Island we took the boat down to the BMT, Bowling Green. In Bowling Green we took the IRT train because my cousin lived in East New York, and I get on that train with a beach chair. I, I wasn't aware that everybody was staring at me, what is a man doing with a beach chair on the subway. But I got the beach chair, and every time I tell stories, and I tell that story to many, many people, and she says, "You should write a book about your beach chair."

LEVINE: What did the beach chair look like?

ROSEN: It's an ordinary folding beach chair.

LEVINE: Like a sling?

ROSEN: Right. Exactly like a sling. You sit in a sling. They're not the modern ones that we have, but in Europe they still use it, in Israel they still use it. Every time you see pictures of Tel Aviv, you see the beach chairs. It has never changed in style. Maybe now they did, but in those years it was exactly like a sling.

LEVINE: Do you still have the beach chairs?

ROSEN: No, no. I think after a while . . . (he laughs) I think the termites got the wood, and the moth got the fabric.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the, well, what ship did you take? Do you remember, when you left Israel?

ROSEN: When we left Israel, yes. I had it written down. Uh, it was also a Greek, a Greek steamer, Piraeus. That's was the name of the ship.

LEVINE: Okay. And, uh, anything about the voyage?

ROSEN: Terrible voyage. We had a miserable voyage. Rough seas. We went steerage. And, of course, we were not permitted on the upper deck. It was a, it wasn't really a steamship. It was a regular st-- steam line. But we were, we had, we were confined to the lower deck. We had to eat, the food was horrible. We threw up a lot because it was all, very rough seas. Traveling, especially, not so much in the Mediterranean, but in the Atlantic Ocean. Once we left Gibraltar, we had the big crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, and it was a very rough --. We weren't permitted on the upper deck, but every once in a while, me being a curious guy and figuring out how to get up to the upper deck, I was up there, I saw the, uh, it was also during the summer, so all the passengers, first class passengers, were all entertaining themselves, and, you know, on the upper deck, and it was very, very nice for them, but we weren't permitted in that, because our passage price did not include socializing with the elite.

LEVINE: Did it include a dining room?

ROSEN: We had our own, we had a terrible dining room. Everything was down below. The only thing that we were permitted as, they had a movie h— a movie on one of the decks, the second deck or the third deck. They had a screen, and, uh, a movie projector, so we were watching movies and, uh, movie was in English, so, of course, we didn't understand, so my mother says, "Don't worry. When you get to America you'll learn the language, and you'll be able to understand what they're saying." But it was a thrill to sit outside in the open air and watch a movie. But very little socializing on the ship. We had -- that's the only entertainment that we had. But I do remember that the food was horrible. Stale bread. The soup was like water. Everything, everything you – you – everything that you read and they depict in those years, we lived through.

LEVINE: Do you remember, uh, the Piraeus coming into the New York Harbor?

ROSEN: Yes. I remember the Statue of Liberty. We all ran on board the ship. At that time they permitted us to go and see . . .

LEVINE: On the deck?

ROSEN: Yes, on the deck, and we were waving, because we didn't know what it was, but we were told that's the Statue of Liberty, and you pass the Statue of Liberty, and you're going to go to Ellis Island. Of course, they told us a lot of things about Ellis Island which made us very fearful.

LEVINE: What kind of things?

ROSEN: Well, they told us that the, uh, people at the port are very strict that you don't bring any diseases from overseas, so you're going to go through a very strict supervision. One of the things that everybody was worried about is glaucoma. They would not let you land in

the United States, or stay in the United States, everybody was permitted to land in Ellis Island, but you go, you went through all those big cages, and they kept you there, for two - two nights we stayed there, taking all these various tests. If you have glaucoma, they ship you right back. There was no way that you can escape. But, of course, we didn't know that.

There may have been people who knew how to reach the, uh, the man at the, all the, uh, people at the, uh, Ellis Island, were all Irish. All the doctors and the, uh, police, everybody was Irish. And, I don't know, for some reason they must have had a vendetta, because they were very, very, I figure they were very strict. They don't want to permit Jews. But, of course, all through life I went through that same feeling, that the Jews are being picked on, and they don't, they don't go out of their way to be nice to you. So we went through and, thank God, everybody was okay. We went through, and my cousin came in from Brooklyn, and that took us to Brooklyn via the IRT. It was the New Lots line, and me with my beach chair.

END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Do you remember, um, sleeping at Ellis Island and eating at Ellis Island?

ROSEN: Will this sh—this can be taken out? (he coughs)

LEVINE: It's okay.

ROSEN: Okay, yes. We slept, uh, one night, in Ellis Island. We slept in the, those were the cages that you see today. They had cots, and we were all confined. (he coughs) We were all confined to a cage, and we slept there. In the morning they gave us breakfast, and they told us, "You are finished with your examination, and you're going to be picked up, and you can leave Ellis Island."

LEVINE: Okay. So then you arrived in Brooklyn.

ROSEN: We arrived in Brooklyn, and the first thing, my cousin took us, me and my brother, they had these ice cream trucks that used to pass by, and they had all kinds of bells on it, and they used to ring the bell, and we used to go out in the house to the ice cream truck, and we had ice cream, the first time we ever had an American ice cream.

LEVINE: Was there any other things that struck you right off as new and different?

ROSEN: As immigrants, I didn't feel different. Because, again, we were in Brooklyn, and that part of Brooklyn was all Jewish. But I started to, to get opposition, and I started to feel that I'm Jewish when I started to go to public school, because we lived in a neighborhood, in East New York, where there were a lot of Italians and Irish. No blacks, but Irish, and mostly Italian, and the Italian, again, they acted like they own us. So I went to public school. I started to, uh, learn the language, which was very difficult. I did study a little English when I

went to public school in Israel, but it was very little. When I came in here I practically did not speak the language, and it took me a few years, and everybody, everybody today wants to know, "You sure you weren't born here? You sure you didn't, you're not American? Because you have very little trace of an accent." But I made a study of it. I'm al-- I'm a stu—I'm a learner. I make up my mind to do something, and I work at it, and I managed to pick up the language where I can mostly be equal to anybody else.

LEVINE: So when you went to school here, were you put in a class with . . .

ROSEN: All right. Here's what happened. I went to school here, P.S. 149, which is a very famous school in East New York. Judge Samuel Liebowitz graduated from that school, Sammy Kaye and Sylvia Fein were my classmates, and that I usually tell because everybody knows, did I say Sammy Kaye? No, I don't mean Sammy Kaye. Sylvia Fein, and, and, uh, the name will come to me. Sylvia Fein's husband was, uh, Danny Kaye. Danny Kaye. And Danny Kaye, in those years, was a, I was sixteen, seventeen years old, he already started to be a showman. He entertained on a milk box right outside of the grocery store, and every night, the milk box was like the hangout, and Danny Kaye was always, always on. And Sylvia Fein lived, lived in Brooklyn. All lived in East New York, and Sylvia Fein was in my class. Danny Kaye was one year ahead, so, but I did see Danny Kaye all the time.

LEVINE: So were there a lot of immigrants, uh . . .

ROSEN: No, in 1930 there weren't too many. The immigrants stopped. But from 1925, when the quota closed, everybody who wanted to come here apparently made it -- from 1930 on. But there weren't as many immigrants as there were prior to, I mean, in 1920's, 1910, 1950, everybody landed on the East Side, on Orchard Street.

LEVINE: So, um, what kind of social life did you have?

ROSEN: Well, I had friends. We had boyfriends, girlfriends. We had a, I lived in East New York where there were, we had a club. In those years, 1930, '31, everybody had a social club. A social club was a room down a basement with a couple of pieces of old furniture that people contributed. We had a Victrola, and we were able to play on the Victrola and have dances. But the group that we lived in were, I called it, I named the club the League of Nation club, because among the twelve people who belonged to the club we had two Irish, six Italian, one Pol—one Polish guy and the rest were Jewish. So we were a League of Nations at that time, and then we learned to get along with, uh, with the other, uh, nationalities. And we got along very well.

LEVINE: And so that was a first, really?

ROSEN: Yes. For me it was a first, right. For, till then we were not accepted as Jews.

LEVINE: Uh, so, were your mother and father pleased with their decision?

ROSEN: Yes. My mother and father was very happy. They were very happy. My father and mother went to night school, and they really wanted to learn the language. Well, of course, at home we spoke Yiddish. To this day I speak Yiddish very well. And one of my activities now that I'm late in life is we belong to the Plainview Y, the YMHA, and we have a club which is called The Yiddish Club, and we have about thirty members, and we have to speak Yiddish. And, for me, it was very easy, but the other people born in America who had European parents, they knew the language, too. But for an American to learn Yiddish was very difficult.

LEVINE: So what did you do in the club?

ROSEN: We, first of all, the leader of the club, a man and wife, they're educators, both schoolteachers, retired, and he reads from the Forwards, he brings the Forwards, and he knows how to read very well, and we discuss current events, and everybody comes in, they're like show and tell. You know, they come in on Tuesday morning, and you want to know what, what did you do during the week? And everybody, and I, I loved, so I developed a reputation of being --(he laughs) fluent in Yiddish.

LEVINE: Okay. So, uh, let's see. Is there anything else about, uh, sort of adapting to this country? Did your mother and father become citizens?

ROSEN: Oh, yes. We all became citizens. Sure. Everybody became citizens. In the meantime, 19, we came here 1930. In 1935 my brother died. He had a kid--.

LEVINE: What was your brother's name?

ROSEN: Joseph. He, uh, developed a kidney failure, and in 1935 they didn't know how to handle that. So he was in the hospital. I'll never forget. He was in the Bethel Hospital. Uh, he died, and he's buried right here in Farmingdale in Montefiore Cemetery, where all my family is buried. The new Montefiore, right here in -- Pinelawn. And, uh, he was a good looking kid, and it was a great loss to my mother. But life goes on, and we managed to, uh, live with the tragedy.

LEVINE: Um, let's see. Well, when you think, um, I guess it's not a question of whether, but in what ways, starting out as you did in Russia and then Rumania and then Israel, how that affected you . . .

ROSEN: It affected me a great deal. It affected me. I keep telling all my friends, we have another new friend. Since my wife died, I've developed a lot of friends at the Y in Plainview. And we keep talking, and I keep telling them, everybody talks about their childhood. I keep telling everybody that I really never had a childhood, because every five years we had to move. So I don't really remember being a child, except in Israel when I was already ten years old, it was a little different. I became to appreciate my age. But in Russia, Rumania, I don't remember any childhood. With all my good memory, I know, I do remember, there was

nothing. We didn't have any childhood. We didn't. My parents, they were loving parents, but not what you have, not what you see here the way children are brought up by their parents.

LEVINE: How was it different?

ROSEN: It's different, uh, I, I really felt all my life that there wasn't enough love. My father was very busy, he always had to be working. My mother was a homemaker. So, I don't know. Maybe in those years they didn't know about love and care and buying children presents, and reading books to them. They couldn't read English to me because they didn't know the language, so everything, I would – I consider myself a self made man. I had to do everything on my own. My parents couldn't speak English. They didn't speak Rumanian. So we spoke Yiddish. Yiddish was the common language. That's why I was so good in reading and, not so much reading, but speaking Yiddish.

LEVINE: Was there a time when you felt like you were more aware and, say, adapted to the culture here?

ROSEN: Oh, yes. I, oh, sure. I was lo— kind of -- everybody was out of step but me. I, I kept surging forward. I, studying and reading and learning things was my ambition in life, and I really worked at it.

LEVINE: Um, okay. Well, uh, so, then, how did you meet your wife?

ROSEN: How I met my wife. I met my wife in East New York again outside of the candy store. There was a candy store on Hendricks Street. My wife had two sisters, Frances, Florrie and Eleanor. Eleanor was my wife. She was the oldest. Uh, her father, their father died in an early age, so the mother brought up the three children, and , uh, we used to meet on the – on the street corner. And there wasn't the corner. It was away from the corner, but it was in front of the candy store. That was the meeting place. And we met, boys and girls met, and we had parties. And, uh, at sweet sixteen party, my wife's sweet sixteen party, my sister-in-law, Florrie, who just passed away, said to Eleanor, who was my wife, she says, "There's a nice young boy downstairs with the crowd, you know, among the boys. Very quiet. And he wears a very nice white sweater. Why don't we invite him to our, to your sweet sixteen?" And that's what they did, and that's where I met my wife for the first time. And, uh, we went out for about seven years, then in 1939 we got married. I have three daughters.

LEVINE: And their names? What was your wife's name?

ROSEN: Eleanor.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

ROSEN: Uh, her maiden name, let's see, again, I have these, uh, Eisenberg. Her name was Eisenberg, had two sisters.

LEVINE: Had she herself come to this country, or she was born here?

ROSEN: No, no, no. She's a second generation American. So I felt kind of foolish, and I – I really wasn't prepared for it, but I made up my mind I'm going to overcome another obstacle, and the fact that I didn't speak too well, but in five -- five, six years that I live here I learned to speak the language, and I really studied.

LEVINE: Your children, you have three . . .

ROSEN: I have three daughters. One now lives in Florida, outside of Fort Lauderdale. One lives right around the corner here. And one lives in Aix les Bains, France. She's the one that's married, Itzak, who is the Hasid, very religious man, but he's a world famous artist. And I'll show you some of his work that he is working on, and the write-up, and I'm very proud of him, and he's very, very talented. She married the man with five children, as I said, whose wife died of childbirth -- of the fifth child, and after they got married they had a boy of their own. So I have six grandchildren living in Europe.

My daughter that lives right around the corner from here, uh, has a daughter, Laura. My granddaughter, she married, her name is Silverstein. And when I went to school here, I went to P.S. 149, I was a very, uh, athletic, and I was very good at playing soccer. So everybody from P.S. 149 wound up in Jefferson High School. Jefferson is very notorious lately because it's a very, very bad school, and the two boys were killed there several years ago. Jefferson is always in the news, on Pennsylvania Avenue, in Brooklyn. I was very good in drawing. I was very good at write – in drawing. My drawing teacher says to me, "Sam, what are you doing when -- when you graduate P.S. 149? Are you going to go to Jefferson?" I yes, "Everybody goes to Jefferson because that's a, they have a good soccer team." And I was the captain of the soccer team in public school.

He says, "Can I give you some advice?" I says, "Sure." His name is Edelson. He says, "Why don't you pursue a career in the arts, or architecture?" And I said, "Well, it sounds good." He says, "Try to get into Brooklyn Technical High School," which is a very famous school in Brooklyn where you go there and from there you go to college to study architecture. I says, "All right, I'll try it." He says, "It's going to be very difficult. They have a very strict entrance exam, but I think you'll pass it." And, sure enough, I passed it, and I went to Brooklyn Technical high school where I wanted to be an architect. I went an extra year in Brooklyn Tech because we had, the last two years we had four hours a day just architecture. So you'd always come home an hour later, and I decided I'm going to be an architect. But, of course, that was during the depression, so all my plans to become an architect had to be cancelled because I had to help my father.

And, but I did pursue that, and I did a lot of studying, and I became an architectural draftsman, and I made a career of it. I was very good at drawing. To this day I went to the, I became an architectural contractor, and, uh, we lived here, we're living here now almost thirty-eight years. My granddaughter who, Laura, that's her picture, who used to come and visit, she practically lived with us. My mo—my wife took very good care of her, and she loved to see, she saw what

I was doing, and she was always down my basement. I have my, I have a drafting table, and I have a drafting room, and that's my office, it's been my office. She used to watch me draw. I said, "Laura, what's this fascination with you, you're six, seven years old." "I like to see you work, Grandpa." I had an office in New York, but I did all my work in home here, and she used to watch me.

And she got a taste of architecture. To make a very long story short, she decided to pursue a career in architecture. She graduated from Mepham] High School here in Long Island. She went to Syracuse University to become an architect. She became an architect, went to Columbia for her – for her Master's. She is now a full-fledged architect. She took her license two years ago, and she's an AIA architect. And we think back how Laura was, she got the bug of being an architect by watching Grandpa work. So that's one of the, what we call nakhas [joy of accomplishment] with the grandchildren here, and she's the only grandchild that my daughter had. She couldn't have any more children.

My other daughter lives in Florida, married, divorced. She has no children. But my daughter who lives in Aix les Bains, France, made up for it. (he laughs) Five, she married a man with five children, and she had one of her own. Every year, I go to France for a bar mitzvah. So I've already been there to four, and this January I think we're going to have my fifth bar mitzvah. One of my, one of the, there were five boys and one girl. The girl was the oldest. She got married last January, so I went to Tel Aviv for the wedding. So I do a lot of traveling visiting my grandchildren.

LEVINE: What would you say you're most proud of?

ROSEN: I'm mo—I'm most proud of my career, that I was a self-taught man. I did everything on my own, very little formal high learning, but during the war -- in 1939 (I was married in 1939. My first daughter was born in '42) -- in '42, I was an architectural student, and I was an architectural draftsman, so in '42 when they started to conscript for the draft, I was classified as having a pre-Pearl Harbor baby. My daughter, Deborah, was born in '42. So that qualified me to get some sort of exemptions so I don't get drafted. And also being an architectural draftsman, I worked for architectural firms during the war who were building airplanes.

So I was a draftsman for General Motors, for Otis Elevator, for Republic Aviation over here, and I went right through the war without seeing the inside of a draft board. Only because I was qualified by having a pre-Pearl Harbor baby, and then my talent for, for drafting. I was always very good at it if I have to say so myself. I do, I went to business -- forty years, I was a contractor. I did my own drawings down in the basement. I had to throw out some of the drawings because it was accumulating and it was getting a little bit. But I was very good in – in – in architectural drawings. The only regret I have is that I did not get a formal education. Because of the Depression I had to go to work, so I went at night, but I didn't learn too much going at night. It was too difficult.

LEVINE: How about this phase of your life?

ROSEN: This stage of my life? Well, having three daughters, having, uh, Laura as a granddaughter, it was difficult because I was a very hard worker. I was, I spent a lot of time at – at my craft. Contractor -- that I, the contracting that I did, I worked for very famous builders in Manhattan. It may not mean anything to you, but you know of Donald Trump, and you know of, uh, Tischman, and you know of all these big builders in Manhattan, and I did work for them. They, I worked for them through a general contractor, and the general contractor and I are friends to this day, but a few years ago I decided I had enough. I used to run into the city every day, travel Long Island Expressway. And when you get on the Long Island Expressway you know what you, but for forty years I did that.

I developed a very good following. A small following, and people to this day keep calling me and saying to me, "Sam, I know you're not active, but do you have somebody that you can recommend to me?" And I always have somebody that sort of takes over what I used, what I started. I started this, I developed a good reputation. Excellent work. You couldn't work for me if – if you were not conscientious and if you did not do good work, just to come in and collect a paycheck and know when you go on vacation wasn't enough for me. And we became very good friends.

My carpenters worked for me for many, many years. So that's one of the things I'm very proud of, that I have a reputation. I go into the city every once in a while, and I visit all my former people that I did business with, and they're all very happy to see me, and I know it's not phony. I know it's genuine, because I was friendly with my contractors. We used to go away together on weekends. We play – I – here -- one of the contractors, a very wealthy man, he had a membership in a golf club -- he always invited me to play in his golf club. We became very good friends. That's one of my proudest things that I have, I have such good friends. Of course, a lot of my friends are not here any more. I sort of survived, outlived them. And, uh, I'm very proud of the fact that you develop a reputation, and I made sure that everybody does things the way I do. And I'm very prompt. I don't keep people waiting. I don't make appointments and cancel. That's my stock in trade.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else you can, would like to say, before we close?

ROSEN: Like what?

LEVINE: About, uh, coming to this country as an immigrant, and making a life for yourself here?

ROSEN: Well, all I know is, uh, nobody gave me anything. My parents were very poor, my father died, my mother died. They were hardworking people. So anything that I, built a house, uh, lived pretty, pretty good. We don't have, we don't -- we're not lavish livers, but we

managed. And it's all my work. But I was a very hard worker. I used to get up six o'clock in the morning, and not come home till eight o'clock at night. Now as I look back and I reflect on my children's childhood, I regret that I didn't spend more time with them, you know, when they were growing up. But I was so busy, I used to come home at eight, nine o'clock at night five, six days a week, so I sort of neglected, but we have a very good relationship with my children. My granddaughter, everybody tells me. I have a friend now, Diane, and my granddaughter lives right here on Long Island in Cold Spring Harbor. She's an architect, she married a dentist, and we're very, very close. And everybody can see how close Laura is to Grandpa. So that's what, she's saying to me, "You have six grandchildren, you have seven grandchildren, but I'm always number one." (Dr. Levine laughs) I said, "Sure, you're number one. You're the oldest." So, you have to rationalize, too.

LEVINE: Closer by, too.

ROSEN: Then she's (?). So she lived here and, uh, my wife died in 1985, so when Laura wanted to get married and she was, uh, looking for a place to live, so I let her live here for about a year, and then she got married. She lived in an apartment, and she lived in a house, and now they bought a very nice house in Cold Spring Harbor, a forty-year-old house which she is redoing. Being an architect, she has a lot of ideas what she wants, and I became a great, great-grandfather in January 4th this year. So I have one great-grandchild. But my granddaughter, who lives in Tel Aviv, is pregnant, so I'll have another great-grandchild.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe that's a good place to end. I want to thank you very much.

ROSEN: You're quite welcome.

LEVINE: For a very interesting story. And I've been speaking with Sam, Samuel Rosen, who came here in 1930, having been born in Russia, lived in Rumania five years, and Israel five years, before coming here, and, uh, this is August 3, 1994, and Mr. Rosen is seventy-nine years old at this time.

ROSEN: That's right.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine. I'm in North Bellmore, Long Island, New York, and I'm signing off.

EI-517/ROSEN