EI-540
EMANUEL JOSEPH STERN
BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 1916
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 12, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 55:52
INTERVIEWER: ELYSA MATSEN
RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM
INTERVIEW LOCATION: BEVERLEY HILLS, CA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL

POLAND, 1920
AGE: 3
PASSAGE ON:
PORT: (PORT IN HOLLAND)
OLD COUNTRY RESIDENCE: NAWATANWIECZ
UNITED STATES RESIDENCE(S): NEW YORK, LOWER EAST SIDE; BROOKLYN

MATSEN: Good afternoon. This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. Today is the twelfth of September 1994. And I'm in the home of Mr. Emanuel Stern. We are in California. We're in Hollywood, California.

STERN: No, Beverly Hills, California.

MATSEN: Beverly Hills, California. Mr. Stern came through Ellis Island in 1920 when he was three years old from Poland. Mr. Stern, why don't you begin by giving me your full name and your date of birth.

STERN: My full name is Emanuel J stands for Joshua Stern. Date of birth is September 19th 1916.

MATSEN: Can you spell your last name for me?

STERN: Yeah. S-T-E-R-N.

MATSEN: Where were you born?

STERN: I was born in a place, I don't know if I can get the pronunciation correct. It was called Nawatanwiecz. I was just going to say don't ask me to spell it. But to the best of my knowledge I think it's spelled N-A-W-A-T-A-N-W-I-E-C-Z. I guess all Polish or Russian words end with C-Z.

MATSEN: Do you know anything about the size of this town or what it looked like?

STERN: Yes. To the best of my knowledge, it would, it reminds me—and talking about it reminds me of the town that I was stationed in when I took my basic training in the army. The, when the train came in my wife would come to visit me and she was leaving. The locomotive and the caboose were both out of town. So you get an idea of the size of

the town. It, it probably was like a one horse or two-horse town. It was a very small village actually from what I heard. And my parents had some chickens. They had a cow. And my father used to occasionally buy a calf or something and kill it and sell the meat. And also he used to go into the woods. And he would work with lumbermen felling trees and selling the wood. And I guess that's how they eked out a living.

MATSEN: Do you remember anything or, or have you been told anything about what your house looked like?

STERN: Yes. I, I remember very clearly a little girl, Polish girl, who was supposedly my age that I used to play with. And we used to catch, I guess you would call them grasshoppers. They would sort of stick to your finger. And I remember trying to make pets out of them. That's the, the only memory I have of ever trying to get a pet. I suppose it was in my genes because all of my children were very much interested in animals and all had dogs. We had a dog. I can faintly remember just running out of the house barefoot.

MATSEN: What was it made of? Do you remember?

STERN: Wood. I remember, very faintly can remember a, a coal stove or a wood stove. Not coal. They didn't have coal. A wood stove in the house. And that's about all.

MATSEN: Plumbing inside?

STERN: I'm sure no.

MATSEN: No, okay. What was your father's name?

STERN: His name was Isaac, I-S-A-A-C, Stern. My mother's name was Rebecca.

MATSEN: And what was her maiden name?

STERN: Trenk, T-R-E-N-K. And also some of the family were known as Frank, F-R-A-N-K. So both the name Trenk and Frank were my maternal side. Now from my paternal side, to the best of my knowledge, my father had no brothers. And my grandfather had no brothers. So it would be pretty far removed to find any Sterns that are blood relatives.

MATSEN: Okay. Can you describe what your father looked like for me?

STERN: Yes. He was a man of about five seven or five eight, slim, very well kept. He had a beard. I always remember, of course, from later. He was very meticulous in his dress, extremely, if there was the slightest stain or anything he wouldn't touch it. And my mom was the same way. They were growing up. We were always bugged that everything had to be clean. Things which I remember as I grew up. There could be no dirty dishes left in the morning in the sink. We had, brought up rather strict. None of us ever sat at the table in the chair that my father sat in or that my mother sat in. That was parental respect. We could

never talk back to a parent. Yet there was a tremendous amount of love from both my parents. I probably was spoiled because I was the youngest in the family.

MATSEN: Is there any story that you remember from your childhood that sticks out in your mind of you and your father?

STERN: Yes, yes. I remember coming to the States and then going to school on the east side of New York. And I was exposed to a lot of rough kids. All of us were potential juvenile delinquents. We were brought up, I mean if you look back into American history, the lower east side of New York was the home of the mafia and the gangs and all that. So our upbringing was very, very strict. But I know that once a week like clockwork every Friday my dad would take me to a bath house where he'd scrub the daylights out of me to really get a good hot scrubbing. And I went into a steam room. Then we went into a pool. And then some more baths. And then we'd go out. And he would buy me for two cents, I remember this very clearly because then I was old already. A glass, what they called an egg cream. It consisted some chocolate syrup, a little milk and fizz water. And that was sort of a treat. And periodically we'd get new clothes. But both my parents were really bugs about cleanliness.

MATSEN: What did your mother look like?

STERN: To me she always looked like a very old person. Some how I guess having that many children and working, she worked with my father. And—

MATSEN: What was the occupation?

STERN: They had a butcher shop. And she used to pluck the chickens and clean them and my dad with the meats. And all of the monies in the house that I came in had to go, the first thing was for the children's education. We all had to have a college education. We all had to study whether we liked it or not. And it was just part of our upbringing.

MATSEN: Is there a story that you can associate with your mother?

STERN: My mom, yes, I remember as a little child always sitting in her lap, her always babying me because I was the baby. Oh it was just every day there was some expression of love and attachment.

MATSEN: That's nice.

STERN: Which I sort of carried on to, more to my grandchildren than to my children.

MATSEN: Name for me all your brothers and sisters.

STERN: All right. I had just one brother. His name was Mordecai.

MATSEN: How do you spell that?

STERN: M-O-R-D-E-C-A-I. Then my oldest sister was Ida. Then I had a sister, Rose. Another sister, Ana, sister Frances, sister Pearl, Helen and Jenny.

MATSEN: What a large family.

STERN: It was a large family, yeah.

MATSEN: Now your brother, was your brother next in line and then you?

STERN: No, no. The lineage was something like this if I can remember it. It was Ida was the oldest, then it was Rose and then was Ana, then was my brother, Mordecai, and then Frances, then Helen, Pearl, Jenny and I. Jenny was not well. She was mentally retarded. The others were very good. My sister, Pearl, died young. She died in childbirth, left one child, a son. They lived in, he lives in Jersey. The others, my sister Ida, had two boys and one girl.

MATSEN: Now did everyone come over together?

STERN: No. No. Ida and Rose came first. They brought the rest of the family over. And I'll just try to give you a quick history of them. Ida has two boys and a daughter. Murray lives in Florida. Leo lives in Arizona. He joined the Marines. The reason I tell you this every, all of, almost all the males in my family joined the army. Rose has two children, Hal

and Augusta. Augusta lives in New York. Hal lives in California. Hal was in the army. In fact he was with me in the signal corps. Then Ana, Ana had two children, Irving, who was with Patton's army and was killed at Verdun. And Barbara, she lives in Maryland. Then Frances, Frances had two children, Jerry and Judy. Judy died young of leukemia. Jerry was in the army. He did not go overseas. Then, that was my sister, Frances. Now let's see the next one. Helen had, Pearl had one son. Has one son, Arnold. He was in the Korean War. Helen had two daughters, no boys so they didn't serve in the army. Jenny never had any children. My brother had, has two sons. They were two children, a boy and a girl. The boy was too young to go in the army, and a daughter. And that's it. I in turn have three sons, Larry, Buddy—his name is William, we call him Buddy—and Allen. Larry is an attorney. He graduated from Berkeley and got his law degree from the Catholic school here.

MATSEN: That's okay.

STERN: The name. Blew the name. Let's see, Buddy graduated from MIT and then graduated from Mount Sinai Medical School. He's a doctor in Silver Spring. Allen, my youngest, graduated from UCLA and got a master's from Northridge. He's a CPA. I myself graduated from St. John's. I have a doctor's degree, Doctor of Jurisprudence, law degree. And my wife went to NYU. The last year she got married she got an MRS degree.

MATSEN: Sounds like a very accomplished family.

STERN: That's it.

MATSEN: Now I'm going to skip you back a little bit. In your family, remember back to your childhood, do you remember cooking? Do you remember what your favorite food was that your mother would make for you?

STERN: Yes, yes, very much so.

MATSEN: Tell me about that.

STERN: Not being wealthy we ate a lot of potatoes and we ate a lot of cabbage. And she used to make cabbage soup. She made all different types of potato puddings, potato pancakes, a thousand and one things that she made, with the result that I still like potatoes. And I still like cabbage soup. Occasionally, I, I remember this very clearly. For Thanksgiving even though my father was a butcher he couldn't afford a turkey. But he always would bring home a capon. And I found out later it was, they would tell me it was turkey. So for years I ate capon and thought it was turkey. So the first time I ate turkey it tasted completely different. But Thanksgiving was a very big holiday for the family. The whole family got together. And we would look forward to it because the food was exceptionally good.

MATSEN: What would be on the table besides the turkey?

STERN: I remember she made some sort of thing out of carrots, which was very good. It was made with honey. That was very good. She also made something with vegetables with prunes, which was very good. Then, of course, we celebrated all the Jewish holidays, which—

MATSEN: Do you remember any particular one?

STERN: Yeah. Well the Friday nights, she baked her own bread. She would buy the fish only live. That I remember very clearly. Because when we started, my father started to earn more money and the kids started to work we moved to Brooklyn. And we actually had a big bathtub. So we'd always find live fish swimming in a bathtub. And then Thursday night, I remember the fish would be there Thursday night. And Friday morning my mom would take care of him, kill them, so the, the only time we could not use the bathtub was Thursday night because there was always a live fish in there. And she would not buy a fish that was killed in the fish market. She had to make sure it was live and kill it, do the killing themselves. So they would prepare fish. And we'd have some chicken and then vegetables. And the bread she would bake herself. And that was, more or less, a weekly routine. And pretty much the same for the holidays.

MATSEN: That's wonderful. I can see why you'd look forward to them.

STERN: Yeah. It was a treat.

MATSEN: Do you remember your grandparents?

STERN: No. I never knew my grandparents.

MATSEN: Okay. Back to religion, what can you tell me about religion in your family?

STERN: It was a very, very strong point in the family. All of the boys my brother and I never went to public schools until we went to parochial schools in elementary school. We went to parochial high school until I was the rebel. And in my last year of parochial high school I said I had enough. And I went to public school. That was my only experience in public school. My brother went on to college to a parochial school. He graduated from Yeshiva University. And then when it came to go to college my father gave me a choice, either you go to a Catholic school or you go to a Jewish school. So I ended up at St. John's. On to a Catholic school, I'd gotten a scholarship, partial scholarship, a hundred dollars a year. And then I worked and I paid the balance of my tuition. And then I went to St. John's law school. And—

MATSEN: What do you remember about grade school? Can you tell me? Do you, do you remember—

STERN: Yeah, grade school I can remember very well.

MATSEN: Tell me a little bit about it.

STERN: It was on the lower east side of New York. We were a bunch of rough kids, really a bunch of rough necks. I would go to school from eight in the morning till seven at night. It was a long haul. And we'd have religious school till three o'clock because I had to wait for the public school teachers to get off to come to our school to teach us, take all our secular subjects. And then we took secular subjects from three to seven.

MATSEN: Long days.

STERN: It was a long day. But I remember—

MATSEN: Any particular friend you can remember?

STERN: Yes, a lot of friends. But I also remember the teachers because every teacher had a big two by four. And I remember many a day getting whacked till we got smart. And we used to have big geography books. So I put a geography book in my pants till the teacher caught me. And there was corporal punishment because that's the type of kids they had, very rough kids. And we weren't easy to control.

MATSEN: What did you do for fun?

STERN: We played in the street. We played stoop ball. You would hit the ball against the, the steps. We would play punch ball where you punched the ball. We didn't have a basketball. The only time I got to know a basketball is when as I grew up I became interested in camping. And I

worked at camp. And then I learned about basketball, and baseball and all of the other sports. And then we got to teach them. But until that time, until I was about seventeen, that's all we knew about sports.

MATSEN: Okay. Coming to America, tell me who came first? Who decided to come to America and why?

STERN: My mother had, was a very strong person. She had made her mind up that the family was going to get out of Poland. So we had the Trenk family—which was my mother's family—they had come here a long time ago. They were probably here a hundred and ten, a hundred and fifteen years. So she sent her two daughters to the States and they lived with their cousins who were the Trenks. And then the girls worked. They got married and they saved up enough money to bring the rest of the family. And they brought the whole family over.

MATSEN: All at one time?

STERN: All at one time.

MATSEN: So every one but two of your sisters came?

STERN: That's right. We all came. I remember very little from the ship except what I wrote in there. I remember running a temperature. I was very hot. And it was a very long voyage.

MATSEN: What time of year was it when you came? Was it hot, cold?

STERN: To the best of my knowledge I think it was toward the end of the summer. And it was very hot. The conditions on the ship, from what I can remember, were very crowded. We probably came steerage. I don't know. But I presume that we did. All I remember is a lot of bundles and a lot of packages. Because my dad, the things he brought over most was his books.

MATSEN: Do you remember getting to the ship? Do you remember how you got to the ship?

STERN: No. I remember riding in a wagon somewhere. I remember being in, in Holland. And, as I said, them giving me cocoa. It was the first time I ever tasted, which was delicious. And I remember a big room where we all slept on the floor. That much I can remember.

MATSEN: Do you remember the port of the name of the ship?

STERN: No. No, not much [unclear].

MATSEN: Do you remember what you took with you? Was there anything special that you took?

STERN: Yeah. I remember I had a, a like a fur hat, which when I went to school it lasted one day. The other kids grabbed it and they threw it in the garbage. It's because they said they never saw anything as ridiculous as that. So that I remember.

MATSEN: Was there a goodbye party for your parents maybe? Do you remember that?

STERN: No. No. No. Nothing at all. In fact, if you look at this picture—

MATSEN: The people on the tape won't be able to see.

STERN: That was some of us. That's what I looked like.

MATSEN: Well describe it for the tape.

STERN: That was taken in Europe.

MATSEN: Okay. What do you look like there? Tell me what you look like.

STERN: Like little kid dressed in a particular, some sort of a coat. It looks like I'm wearing a tam. And my brother wasn't in the picture. He was in school when we took this picture.

MATSEN: How about when you were on the ship? Do you remember eating on the ship? Do you remember anything about that? Do you remember any rough storms?

STERN: No, not at all.

MATSEN: Do you remember getting sick?

STERN: No. Unfortunately, the only ship I can remember is the ship going over from the port of Boston to England during the war, which was miserable. That's the only ship I can remember.

MATSEN: How about seeing the Statue of Liberty?

STERN: That I remember. That—

MATSEN: Tell me about that.

STERN: Everybody came out on the ship because I remember because I remember my mom holding me and pointing to it and saying that's the symbol of the United States. In other words, that was the American symbol to them. And it seems everybody was waiting to look at that.

MATSEN: Do you remember being three what you thought of that?

STERN: No. I have no idea.

MATSEN: But everyone was looking at it.

STERN: Yeah. That I remember, everybody going, going out to look at it because in those days they went to Ellis Island.

MATSEN: Right. Now when you were on Ellis Island do you remember what it looked like? Do—

STERN: Not too much, no. I went, when we went back I tried to but it's, it's changed so. There was a place called Castle Garden, that I remember. It was a huge round place. That's about all I can remember of it.

MATSEN: Medical examinations.

STERN: Yeah, medical examination. I remember the doctor asked me, how do you feel, and I said, fine. I was coached. That I remember very clearly. They told me when the doctor asked you, you say fine. Say fine and that was it.

MATSEN: Before you came to this country did your parents or did anyone in your family know any English?

STERN: No, none at all.

MATSEN: Who taught you to say fine?

STERN: On board ship.

MATSEN: Okay. Were you detained at Ellis Island?

STERN: No, no we got right through.

MATSEN: Okay. Coming to your life once you came to America, where did you go after you left Ellis Island?

STERN: They had rented an apartment for us, which I think was a, a three-room apartment or a four, I don't remember. I remember, I think I remember the address. It was 283 Grand Street on the lower east side.

MATSEN: Do you remember what it looked like?

STERN: Yes. It was a walk-up apartment. I remember there was a toilet in the hall, not in the apartment. In the apartment I can remember we had, in the kitchen there was a washtub and that was where we took baths in that washtub. We washed. My mother did the laundry, everything in that one miserable washtub.

MATSEN: Did everyone live in the same house, your sisters—

STERN: Everybody lived together, yeah.

MATSEN: So that was your sister's place before you came.

STERN: Yeah.

MATSEN: What jobs in America did your parents get first?

STERN: My father went to work for a butcher because he had handled calves and cows and so on so he was familiar with that.

MATSEN: Your mother?

STERN: My mother, at first, didn't work until my father saved up enough to buy a store, to buy into a store and then she worked in the store. My sisters, let's see. I remember them going to school. I think, well, my older two sisters that were here, they were married. They lived someplace else but—

MATSEN: Were they working?

STERN: When they were married, no. My older sister lived in Connecticut. Her husband had, in Ansonia, Ansonia, Connecticut. They had a, a little store in which they sold newspapers, and candies and stuff like that. And it was attached to a little barbershop. So they lived there.

MATSEN: And her husband's name.

STERN: Sam.

MATSEN: Last name.

STERN: Bruskin, B-R-U-S-K-I-N. And then my other sister, Rose, her husband was Jack, Jack Berlfein, B-E-R-L-F-E-I-N. He was in the leather business. He used to buy and sell leather skins.

MATSEN: In New York?

STERN: In New York, yeah. And they lived in the Bronx. And my sister, Ana, and Frances, got jobs working in a dress factory sewing. Helen was still too young to work. And Pearl was—

MATSEN: What was the neighborhood like?

STERN: On the lower east side? You sat outside during the summer because it was too hot to sit inside.

MATSEN: Where were people from?

STERN: All over, all over.

MATSEN: Mostly an immigrant neighborhood?

STERN: Immigrant, yeah, yeah, because there were Italian and Poles and Swedes. There was a complete potpourri of people.

MATSEN: Communication problems? Did everyone know English or—

STERN: We picked up English pretty fast.

MATSEN: How did you learn English? Do you remember that?

STERN: Just picked it up.

MATSEN: And your parents the same?

STERN: Same way. Of course when I started school they, they started to teach me English right away.

MATSEN: Any bigotry that you remember, persecution when you were living in America?

STERN: Not at school because I was going to parochial schools. Oh yeah, yeah, fights all the time with the Pollack kids would attack us. And we would fight back. And the way we would fight back, I used to tell my kids about it. The garbage cans were all metal. And there were covers to the garbage cans. So you took those. And those were your shields. And then you stole pieces of coal and you put snow around them and you threw snowballs that were coal inside. Because we found out when we got hit with the snowballs the coal hit us and this was the way we fought back. But we learned to fight back. You had to fight back to survive.

MATSEN: So it was a rough neighborhood.

STERN: It was a very rough neighborhood, extremely rough.

MATSEN: And how long did you live there?

STERN: We lived there, I think, till I was about eight. Then we moved to Brooklyn. We lived at a place called Throop Avenue, which was very nice. It was like a, a I think a three or four family building. And it was clean and it had a bathtub, and toilet and everything. It had all the facilities. And that was, that was pretty nice.

MATSEN: Any tragedies happen to your family when you came to America?

STERN: Yeah. The first tragedy was my sister, Jenny, was riding on a trolley car. And in those days they used to pull a lever when you came in and you paid five cents or three cents or whatever it was. And it was a heavy bar, [Telephone rings] Just disregard it. And it fell down and hit her in the head and that's what caused her retardation.

MATSEN: So before that there was no sense that—

STERN: Oh she was, she was fine.

MATSEN: So it was an accident that happened to her—

STERN: It was an accident that happened. And I remember people coming to our house and telling my parents to sue the company and so on. And I'll never forget because I was very angry when I grew up and I became a lawyer—

MATSEN: Did she go to a doctor, a hospital?

STERN: No. We couldn't afford a doctor so you didn't go. I mean they put compressors on and so on and so forth. But later on it began to show. And they took her to a doctor. It was too late. Nothing you could do. It had damaged the brain. But I remember growing up and my mom passed away while I was in law school. Coming home and being very angry and saying how come you never sued. And, and you could have gotten medical attention for this girl. Well it was too late. The statute of limitations had passed and so on. So that was the only tragedy that, you know, the big family tragedy. But other than that, you know, getting hit and run over and so on, and normal cuts and bruises and beat up. I mean that, you just took that—

MATSEN: Par for the course.

STERN: Par for the course. You just took that in your daily routine. No big deal was made about it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

MATSEN: Well Mr. Stern, tell me a little bit about your life. Tell me how you met your wife.

STERN: That was rather interesting. I was, I had a class in insurance, Professor Donnelly. Who was a very nice guy but very boring. So I was sitting next to a friend of mine, a fellow by the name of Sherman,

and I said to him, Ben, I said, what are you doing for the summer. He says he's going to camp. I said no, I'm through going to camps. It's high time, because at camp you'd get about fifty dollars for the summer. And so I got a job with another friends of mine, Sam Burke, working at Stevenson Lake Hotel as a busboy. Now as a busboy you got a lot of tips. So I was going to get tips and I was going to make some money. It's high time I stopped being a camp counselor. So about two days later he comes into me and says, you know, I just got a job at a new camp. And I'm going to be the dramatics coach there. And this camp is looking for somebody that could run the newspaper and that can conduct religious services—

MASTEN: Where was the camp?

STERN: This camp that he's telling me about is up in Glenwild, New York just before Monticello. And it was called Camp Marymount. So I said, no, no. But I came home and I mentioned it. Well my parents were very unhappy that I was going to go and be a busboy. Because my father said that the busboys were college boys who were to be glorified gigolos. I remember he told me that. They were to entertain the girls and the women. He says and that's not a job for my son. He didn't realize I was looking forward to it. But my parents did have a lot of influence on me. [Telephone rings] And—

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

MATSEN: Okay. We're back with Mr. Stern. We were interrupted by a telephone call. But we're talking about his experiences growing up—

STERN: Going to camp.

MATSEN: And meeting his wife.

STERN: Anyway, so I listened to my father and I cancelled the job that I was going to get as a busboy. And I went up for an interview at this camp office. And there was a director there and a cute girl working in the office. So they signed me up. I took the job. After we were at the camp about three weeks there was a problem with the head counselor. And he was let go. And I sort of took over as head counselor. So Friday night after the children went to sleep I would have a staff meeting. And at the staff meeting I would go through with the counselors each child's record and so on. And this cute little girl who I saw in New York at the office, she worked in the office up there. So after we got through with the meeting I took the whole staff into the kitchen. And they had some cake and tea, coffee. And this nice looking woman comes in and she, she helps herself to a cup of coffee. And I went over and says, ma'am, I'm sorry. We don't permit any parents in here. So she said, well what are all these people doing here? I said to her, well you want your child taken care of, I have to treat my staff nicely. She says, I'm very happy to see it. And she walked out. The next morning as the children were lining up for flag raising I noticed this lady whom I had seen in the kitchen the night before talking to the director. And the directors says to me, Manny,

come over here. So I'm thinking to myself, ah-ah, some parent already bitched to the director that I chased her out of the kitchen. So I walked over there. And he said I'd like you to meet this lady and introduces a name, Ann. I says, fine. I says we met last night. He says I want you to know she's one of the owners of the camp. She said to me, Manny, I want to thank you for taking good care of my camp. That was it. And we became, It turned out to a very nice friendship. We became very good friends. And she kept coming up periodically throughout the summer. In the meantime, this little office girl I sort of took a liking to. She was very nice. So when we got back to the city after the summer I introduced her to a friend of mine. And I had a party at my house and invited all the counselors and this particular friend of mine. And we kept on. Then New Year's Eve came around and we were all going out for New Year's Eve. And we were going out to a formal affair. Now I didn't have a date so some friend of mine arranged a blind date for me. So we went out. And the blind date to me was a total dud. But I found myself most of the evening talking to this cute little blonde whom I introduced to my friend. And the evening was over I managed to drop my date and spent the rest of the evening with the rest of the crowd. Shortly after that, I found out that this girl whom I liked so much was the daughter of the woman who owned the camp. And this Ann kept inviting me over to her house. And every time I came to the house June was there, this young girl. And somehow or other we started to go out. And at first I said to her, well, it isn't right. You were going with my friend, Jack. She says no we broke up. And I started to go with her. She ended up being my wife. And we are now married, thank god, fifty-three years.

MATSEN: Oh what a nice story.

STERN: So it was quite a romance. And she's a good kid.

MATSEN: Sounds like it. Are you happy that you came to America?

STERN: Yes, very much so, especially after what I—

MATSEN: How about your parents, were they happy?

STERN: Very much. If ever I was taught a love of country—I get very emotional about it—it was because my parents instilled it in us. And the proof was that every male member of our family enlisted.

MATSEN: That's a wonderful tribute.

STERN: Our country needed us and there were no two ways about it.

MATSEN: Well, Mr. Stern, I want to thank you for giving us this opportunity to come here to your house and interview you.

STERN: Thank you.

MATSEN: You've told us a wonderful story. This is Elysa Matsen. I'm signing off with Mr. Emanuel Stern in California on September 12th, Monday, 1994, for the Ellis Island Oral History project.

STERN: Before you sign off, I just want to tell you one thing. And that I learned in the army. One of the officers that I served under was a Japanese major. And although we were at war with Japan this fellow was one of the finest officers we ever had. I'm trying to remember his name now.

MATSEN: Do you have any stories you could tell me from when you served in the army?

STERN: Oh yeah. That's, that's a whole, some day I'm going to write a book about it because that was, It, it was almost I would say by the grace of God. Because I trained to be a pole lineman climbing up poles. And the, the last day of my exercises we had to go on a forced march with an eighty-pound pack on my back. And Neosha, Missouri, in general, was a place, I think, that God forgot to create because a hundred and twenty degrees in the shade. You could fry an egg on the sidewalk. And when we stood retreat at five o'clock men keeled over like flies. They used to give us salt pills. Coming back from this forced march there was always what we called a meat wagon, an ambulance, at the end. And if you fell out you got into the ambulance and you had to do it all over again. So the last quarter of a mile I collapsed. And there were two Southern guys, it was a Southern outfit. One on one side of me another, and to tell you, We became very good friends while in service. But they didn't know what shoes were when we went in the army. That's how backward they were. They were powerful guys. One put an arm under here and the other under here and they literally carried me. Brought me into the shower room in my barracks, dropped

me under a shower and turned on the shower. So I didn't have to do it again. That was on a Thursday. The final exercise was Saturday morning. We had to climb up a forty foot pole, string a line and come down. I was so excited coming down because we were going to get a pass to go out. And my wife had come up to visit me and I hadn't seen her yet. That I slid down the pole and I got full of stickers from the wood. Anyway, I went to the infirmary and they took them out. And I got out. And I passed my basic training.

MATSEN: Where were you stationed?

STERN: Neosha, Missouri, Camp Crowder. Then about two weeks later my wife was leaving going back to the States. It was Friday morning. I hear my name called out. By that time I was a private first class. And it says report to headquarters. I report to headquarters and the captain says to me, Stern, go back, get new clothing. President Roosevelt issued an order that every soldier must have a four-day pass before he goes overseas. I said I'm going overseas. He says, yes. He said but I want you to know that it's top secret. You're being sent to a very special place. We can't tell you where or why. But you get a four-day pass, get new clothing and you can leave tonight. Well I couldn't wait to run to my wife in town and tell her, honey, I'm going back with you because we were married before I got in the army. We went back to New York. I was in New York two days, three days. And I went back to Missouri. And in New York that was the story in itself I won't go into with beautiful things happened to me. Anyway, went back to Missouri, got on a train and went back to Boston. They put us

on a ship. They picked out twelve of us, twelve men. None of us knew why we were picked. Out of the twelve men there was one fellow I remember very clearly, Roger Green III who was a graduate of Harvard. Stan Kowalski, who was fluent in Polish. Some of the other names will come to me. Anyway, the twelve of us get shipped out of the States. We're put into, all the way at the bottom of the ship. It's a British ship. It's called the *SS Britanict.* I'll never forget that name as long as I live, how miserable it was. And it took us fifteen days to go across. After seven days across all of us were deathly sick because the British, it was a British merchant ship. So we were under the rule of the British merchant marine. They would lower a bag, a box to us. And it has as follows: hard-boiled eggs, rancid bacon, some bad fish, all in one thing. So none of us could eat it. So we had some money and we could bargain with the crew, which was civilian. And for five dollars we could buy two turnips and a potato. So we used to buy two turnips and a potato, which I learned to eat turnips. Potatoes I always could eat. Till one day the medical examiner came down. And he took a look at us and he said, what the hell is going on here. And we said to him, sir, we're supposed to be choice troops. They won't let us out. This is what we're being fed. Well he blew his top. Immediately they put us on deck. They got us a place to wash up and clean up. And he said at least you can have K rations, regular American rations. And the rest of the trip we spent on the deck. It was beautiful. It was nice. The Queen Mary passed us twice. We got into Liverpool and the damn Germans had excellent information. We got on a train. We smelled. We hadn't had a shower. And from Liverpool to London we were constantly being strafed.

MATSEN: Now what year is this?

STERN: This is 1942, '43, '44. It was either '42 or '43. I don't remember now. We got into London and we were taken by truck to a barracks, which I later realized was the Coldstream Guards barracks. We were put in there and we had straw mattresses and double-deckers. The first night we were there there was an air raid. We ran out. And had our first experience with an air raid. Went back. Got up in the morning and no sooner, it was, We were lining up for, to get some breakfast. And it's still filthy and smelly and everything. When I hear my name called out, report to headquarters. I report to some captain there, Captain Taylor. I remember his name. And he says to me, he says, corporal I see on here that you're an attorney. I says yes. He says still remember any law? I says I never really got a chance to practice. He says fine. He says report to headquarters to the sergeant, get new clothing, take a shave, wash up. And when you don't stink so badly come back here. So I came back. He said you're going to go to school for a week. And you may be wearing civilian clothing. You may be in, I said, sir, can I ask you one question? Where are we? He says, well you might as well know where you are. You're in London. You're in General Eisenhower's headquarters. And you're going to have to be very good soldiers. There was going to be a lot of brass around here all the time. You're stationed with the Coldstream Guards and you'll be under an American command and also under a British command. So the next day I went to school, an afternoon of school, one half hour. I kept answering the questions. The instructor called

me up. He says how come you know all the answers. I said, well I'm an attorney. He said, do me a favor. For the next week don't come to class because you're disrupting the class. Go around and visit London. So I did. And from that point on I was put on a team, which was an investigating team which consisted of one officer and myself. The officer turned out to be a detective from Manhattan, New York, Eddie Orr, an Irishman but a true Irishman. The guy, he was happy go lucky. It was an excellent combination. He said to me, he says, I don't know a goddamn thing about law. I know about being a policeman. He says you do the law work. I'll do the police work and we'll get along real fine. So from that point on we, we were sent out to front line investigations. We were sent all over the European Theatre. But we, this was after the invasion. And we didn't mind the danger because we were more or less just a company of our own. So we had to go through German lines. We fought our way through. But all of that didn't matter as long as we were, until the Germans broke through at the Battle of the Bulge. And then we had a serious problem. Eddie had separated from me. And then we got together again. And we were riding in a jeep. And we were coming back to the American lines. We were in Brussels in Belgium. We got to the American lines and they stop us. We understand that the Germans had killed a whole cadre of American soldiers, put on their uniforms. They speak perfect English. And they're coming back to the American lines. So the MPs are not letting any Americans or anybody through till you get a thorough examination. So they start asking me questions. And I gave a stupid answer. They said do you shoot crap. I said yeah. He says what's little Joe. I blanked out, just completely blanked out. So I see

one of them pulls his thing back. And they'll shoot you on the spot. I mean there was no, no trial or anything. I was sweaty. So Eddie, this lieutenant, turns to the guy and he says, what do you expect from a Jewish kid that went to Jewish schools? He wouldn't know anything about snake eyes. So the guy looks at me. He says you're Jewish. I says yeah. He says, come here. I lowered my trousers. He saw my circumcision. He says go ahead. Otherwise I never would have got through. So it was pretty, pretty sweaty. We got back and then we, but before this I want to go back. When I was in England and my outfit shipped overseas I was left alone with about four other soldiers from my outfit. And one day I get a call, that time I was a sergeant. It said sergeant you're going to take a convoy over to France. And you have to go down to Portsmouth. You'll pick up the convoys. It'll be forty truckloads of radio equipment, communication equipment. You'll be in charge. So I got orders. At that time there was signed by General Beetle Smith who was Eisenhower's adjunct, and General Brown. And I took the convoy across. I got on the ship. You know it was really nothing, no big deal. We landed in Normandy. And I needed to have the ship unloaded. This was late Friday night, well actually Saturday morning, about three in the morning. And I had to get the ship unloaded on the pier on the,

there was no pier. There was no dock. We just had to load it onto the shore. And to get in touch with my outfit, I knew the code word where to reach them. And they would send the trucks out to pick the stuff up. So the officer in charge of a port, or what they called a port, was a major. So he comes up to me and without even thinking I was involved in this I says, sir, I need a telephone. I have to call my headquarters and everything.

He says, what army are you from? So I look at him like I'm crazy. I said what do you mean what army? I'm from the American army. He said don't you salute a superior officer? So I said to myself, uh-uh, I got a joker here. So I saluted to him. I said I apologize sir. Can I get a telephone? He says let's take things easy. I said, sir, one moment please. I pull out my orders and I had it to him. He read it. He says, come. We'll get you a telephone. We get to a phone. My code word was liberty. I still remember that. I get through to liberty. And get my colonel , Colonel Angstrom, on the phone. And I tell him, sir, I have some military problems here. I says I forgot to salute a senior officer. He says put the son of a bitch on the phone. Those were his words. And I hear this major saying, yes sir, yes sir, yes sir, yes sir. Keeps yessing. And he hands me back the phone and he says, okay, sergeant. You have nothing to worry about. You just go ahead and do the best you can. Get the ship unloaded. He says I'm relying on you to do it. Fine. So I go back. And again, I don't want to sound racist. In those days the army was segregated. We had a black port battalion. They did port battalion work. I started to get them to unload the ship and I was having a rough time, a very rough time. Stuff was being dropped into the water. I said to myself, if ever I'm going to be court-martialed this is going to be it. So by about nine in the morning I have very little of the ship unloaded. And I noticed some PWs, some prisoners of war, walking by. So I run up and I get this major and I said, sir, do you have any PWs here? He said, yeah, we have a whole cadre of them. I said what are they doing? Nothing. I said I need them to unload the ship. I said these Germans will work very well. So they had what they call a [unclear] a German sergeant in charge. I

explained to him in my broken German and Yiddish the best that I could how to get this ship unloaded and what had to be done. And then I just said on word. I said Ich bin Jude. Told him I'm a Jew. He didn't flinch. But they really started to unload that ship. And I was getting [unclear]. Around two thirty, two of the girls from the Red Cross came over. They said they have to have lunch. I says, lady, I haven't had breakfast yet. I says give me at least another hour. She says, well we can't. I says I'm a sergeant. This is my name. This is my serial number. You report me. But we're not stopping. I need another hour before I can stop. And then, let them eat. I'll eat, too. And then we'll go back to work. Okay. There was nothing she could do. We worked. We stopped. We all had something to eat. I put them back to work. An hour later she comes to me, they're not allowed to work anymore. I said, lady, they're going to work. I have to get this ship unloaded. There's a war on. But the Geneva, I says, they're not being harmed. They're being treated very well. They're not at the front lines. I said I'm going out there. They're going to be back here. But I have to have this ship unloaded. P. S. we got the ship unloaded. P. S. I got the Bronze star.

MATSEN: That was what you, you received the Bronze Star for?

STERN: Later on when the war was over we were going back. I was given an award. I was given a choice. I could remain and get a field commission as an officer or I had enough points. I had been up to action enough that I had more than enough points required to go back. I said no I want to go back. And that was it.

MATSEN: Well I'm glad we didn't sign off when we were going to and you were able to—

STERN: I thought you'd find that interesting.

MATSEN: Oh definitely. That was a great story. This is Elysa Matsen now signing off with Mr. Stern. And it is September 12th, Monday afternoon, 1994, for the Oral History project of Ellis Island.

END OF INTERVIEW