

EI- 567

MALVINE FAINBERG

BIRTHDATE:

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 16, 1994

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 76

RUNNING TIME: 10:15

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ORAL HISTORY STUDIO, ELLIS ISLAND

TRANSCRIPT TRANSCRIBED BY: AMY TORRES

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

COUNTRY: BELGIUM

AGE: 23

SHIP: EXCALIBUR

PORT: PORTUGAL

RESIDENCES: Forest Hill, NY

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Today is November 16, 1994 and I'm here in the Oral History Studio at Ellis Island with Malvine Fainberg. Mrs. Fainberg came from Belgium in 1941 when she was 23 years old. She arrived at Ellis Island with her husband and her three month old baby.

LEVINE: Well I'm very happy that you're here and I know we have a limited time for this interview so we'll try to move quickly.

FAINBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: Perhaps you can tell me what it was that lead up to your leaving Belgium at the time you did.

EI-567 FAINBERG

FAINBERG: Well we left Belgium because of Hitler and we went through France and had my baby in France. Then we went to Portugal where we sailed to America.

LEVINE: Did you stay in France for awhile?

FAINBERG: Six months.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you were – had you had any first hand experiences with the, with Hitler or with the rise ---

FAINBERG: No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: No.

FAINBERG: We always were ahead. My husband was in the army, too. In the Belgian army and I fled with my parents-in-law and we were reunited in the South of France.

LEVINE: I see. So, did you, is that where you had your baby, in the south of France?

FAINBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FAINBERG: In Marseille.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so, ok, do you remember the departures, the actual leavings, when you left Belgium, when you left France.

EI-567 FAINBERG

FAINBERG: Well Belgium was invaded on May 10th. And the city of Antwerp was bombed and we left for the coast. And from there as we heard that Hitler was advancing, we left Belgium over to France. And as Hitler was advancing we moved on until we got to the South of France and they had this sort of armistice and was a demarcation line. And there we stayed and waited until I heard from my husband and was reunited with him. And there my baby was born and a few months later we left France and we went to Portugal and we sailed from there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. Now had your family been in the Belgian army up until the time you actually left? I mean he, up until the time that you –

FAINBERG: Yes, yes. He was in the army when we left. We lost each other for three months until we were reunited.

LEVINE: Ok, so you left from Portugal. What do you remember about either before you left or the actual voyage?

FAINBERG: What, from Portugal?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FAINBERG: Well Portugal was very good already, we stayed three weeks in Portugal waiting for the boat and we left on the American liner the Excalibur and we were first class, this was a very good trip, I mean, no problems.

LEVINE: Can you describe the accommodations on the ship?

EI-567 FAINBERG

FAINBERG: Oh I had a very good accommodation. First class, we had two cabins, one for my in-laws and one for my husband and myself and the baby. And the food was very good, naturally. And it took ten days.

LEVINE: Were there steerage passengers on that ship?

FAINBERG: That I don't know. I don't think so. Maybe, I don't know, I really wouldn't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FAINBERG: No, we had a very good trip.

LEVINE: Well were a lot of the people who were sailing with you were they people who were also fleeing?

FAINBERG: Oh yes, sure. Of course. Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. So you must have felt wonderful to be, I mean, to have gotten away and to be on –

FAINBERG: Of course! We were very happy and happy when we arrived here, had a brother waiting for me and then we were called back, they called baby Alan Fainberg back onboard ship and we went to the immigration and they said, "Your baby wanted to enter the United States illegally you have to go to Ellis Island, we will not separate the baby from the parents." And we both had to go.

LEVINE: Well can you describe what happened when the ship came into the harbor, did you see the Statue of Liberty?

EI-567 FAINBERG

FAINBERG: Yes, it was a thrill! That was a big thrill, yes yes.

LEVINE: And then the ship went to Battery Park –

FAINBERG: I suppose so.

LEVINE: Landed, and then you –

FAINBERG: And we got off and we were met by family and friends and I was, we were about to get into the car to go to the city when the announcement came over the loudspeaker and we had to go back.

LEVINE: So you were about to get into the car and you heard this?

FAINBERG: That's right. That's right. And then they said that if we get to Ellis Island before three o'clock we would still have the hearing but we got there, naturally, after three o'clock and had to stay overnight.

LEVINE: Describe your impression of Ellis Island when you go there.

FAINBERG: I was very sad and I cried all night long. And I was with my baby alone in a room with eight beds and a crib because the men and women were separated, naturally, as you know. And the next morning when I asked when the hearing would start the matron said to me, "What boat did you come on?" And I said, "The Excalibur." She said, "Well, we are three days late, you have to wait." And I was very upset and I said to my husband, I was crying. And I could see there now, this man opening the door, nine o'clock sharp, and called for the first hearing, "Alan baby Fainberg." And we were called in and there was a judge and we were questioned

and had to swear that was our baby and so on and so forth. Then my sister-in-law came and they told her she was responsible to take the baby to the post office and have him fingerprinted. We went to the main post office on 34th street. We came up, they said, "Can we help you?" My sister-in-law said, "We have to register this baby and fingerprint him." They said, "Who sent you here?" We said, "The immigration." They said, "We don't fingerprint babies." So my husband said, "Just give us a piece of paper to tell that we were here." And that was it and then we went on home.

LEVINE: What sense did you ever make of why this happened?

FAINBERG: I asked, I asked, I said, you know the consulate in Marseille said everything was in order, that the baby's name should be on the passport. And when we got the Portugal my husband went to the consulate, to the boat company and they said everything was in order. So I mentioned that to the immigration officer and he said, "My dear lady, if you would know what the consulate in Europe doesn't know what it's supposed to know, you'd be surprised."

LEVINE: Did you ever, did you ever figure it out to your own liking?

FAINBERG: No, no, no. Just that we had a visa and I suppose that because the child did not have a visa. But I was told that he did not need a visa, he just had to be on the mother's passport.

LEVINE: Well it may have had to do with smuggling a baby –

FAINBERG: No, I don't think so. I don't think so, I really don't know. And I didn't care anymore because we were safe.

EI-567 FAINBERG

LEVINE: Well what are your feelings about Ellis Island and it sort of seems mixed--?

FAINBERG: Well at that time it was very clean. I had a room to myself, it was not bunks like we saw in the movies, we had beds. And food was good and clean, but we just stayed overnight and I just had dinner the night before and breakfast and that was it.

LEVINE: What about the other people that were here at the time you were? Did you meet anybody?

FAINBERG: No, not really, I was too busy with my baby.

LEVINE: Oh.

FAINBERG: I was too busy with my baby and upset naturally so we had no...

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how is it for you seeing Ellis Island now after all these years?

FAINBERG: Well naturally it brings back memories. It was a very unhappy day for a first day in the States but I got over it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how about the rest of your life? Just sort of a thumbnail sketch, you went from here, you mentioned you went right to Forest Hill?

FAINBERG: No, I went, we didn't have a house yet. I went to my brother in Brooklyn and then we bought a house in Forest Hills and then we moved into Forest Hills and we lived there ever after.

EI-567 FAINBERG

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what, is Alan Fainberg your only child?

FAINBERG: No, I had another child here in the States.

LEVINE: And his name?

FAINBERG: William.

LEVINE: William, uh-huh. And let's see, is there anything else you can think of about coming here, about living most of your life here, about being an immigrant who –

FAINBERG: Well I was young enough to adapt quickly. It's not like the older people who took, it was more difficult. My in-laws for instance, was more difficult to adapt. But I was young enough to adapt and my family was here and friends and so on so this was really my home. And I lived longer here than in Europe.

LEVINE: Did you speak English when you came?

FAINBERG: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Ah. Uh-huh.

FAINBERG: And my husband did too.

LEVINE: Ok, is there anything else you can think of before we close?

FAINBERG: No, not really, not really.

LEVINE: Well I want to thank you very much. This was on such short notice.

EI-567 FAINBERG

FAINBERG: You're very welcome, you're very welcome.

LEVINE: And it was a pleasure to meet you and thank you.

FAINBERG: Thank you too.

LEVINE: And now your story will be on tape for posterity here at Ellis Island.

FAINBERG: Oh! Ok.

LEVINE: Ok, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service I've been speaking with Malvine Fainberg.

FAINBERG: Malvine Fainberg.

LEVINE: Malvine Fainberg and it's November 16th, 1994 and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW