

EI-592

RENEE SCHNEER LEVINE

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**STATUE OF LIBERTY/ELLIS ISLAND FOUNDATION STAFF
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LEVINE: Today is March 21st, 1995. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here with Renee Schneer [ph] Levine who works for the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation and has worked signing up people for the wall of honor, the highest number or the most people ever signed up was signed up by Renee Levine. And she has been working with the foundation since April 1993 and continues to do so to the present time.

We're going to talk on this side of the tape about the wedding of Renee's daughter, Joel, which took place on the nineteenth of March, just a few days ago. It has the distinction of being the first evening wedding of grand proportions that has ever taken place in the Great Hall, or here at Ellis Island for that matter. I want to start out by asking you, Renee, what it is, how it was that you came to conceive of having the wedding here.

RENEE: Well, in working for the foundation, I had – I had worked at various evening events that they had here on Ellis Island and I thought it would be an extraordinary place to have the wedding. It didn't have the

reality for me until one day, the concessionaire, whose name is Mike Conchlain [ph], came to me and said, "You look a little bit despondent". And I said, "Well, I really -- I'm not quite sure where to have Joel's wedding." And he said, "Well, have you thought about Ellis Island?" And I said, "Constantly, but I don't think it's feasible." And he said, "Come, let's talk". And so I went up to his office and we did talk and he made the entire happening possible by offering me, within my monetary means, the opportunity to bring people out to the island after hours and have the wedding here.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you say, for the record, your daughter's name and your now son-in-law's name.

RENEE: Right, my daughter's name is Joel Susanna Levine, and my son-in-law is a doctor, Lawrence Freedman [ph], his middle name being David. At some point in his life, within the last year and a half, he decided to use his Hebrew name instead of Lawrence and so we call him Eliasa [ph].

LEVINE: And what was their response to having the wedding here at Ellis Island?

RENEE: They were both -- it surprised me actually because I gave them a choice between Ellis Island and a synagogue in Manhattan. And both of them chose to do it on Ellis Island. I think he, a little bit more than she, felt the significance of having it here on Ellis Island, of the historical importance of having it here on Ellis Island. And -- and, when they said yes, then we all got to work.

LEVINE: Can you say something about the event and how it -- how it transpired in this particular setting?

RENEE: (Draws breath) Actually, it was set up, I think, beautifully. I'm going to talk about, a little bit, as far as I know, the intricacies of having a Jewish religious, or a religious Jewish wedding. What we had on the first floor of the museum, which is known as the Baggage Room, we had people arrive, in the same way that the immigrants arrived through the main doors. And then, to the right of the main doors, we set up a very pretty white wicker chair, where my daughter sat with her friends as attendants to keep her busy and amused while the groom sits with religious men and his rabbi, his father, and any relatives at a table, signing the contract that bethrows actually, the bride to the groom.

In signing the contract, he actually is the only one that signs the contract. The bride never signs the contract. The contract, which is known as the *petuba* [ph], is an agreement that the man has to take care of the woman during the years of their marriage. He signs that contract. The two mothers, the mother of the bride, the mother of the groom, meet in that room to break a plate. You're gonna have to find out from Penelope (laughs) the exact significance of that. But I do believe that the plate has something to do with sealing of the contract. And shortly after that, all of the men sitting around the table with him, dance him into the area where the bride is sitting and she was actually sitting with the Statue of Liberty right behind her. And they dance him into the room, a horde of men. She told me it sounded like -- like a stampede of horses coming at her. And she said it was one of the most intense moments of her life.

And then finally they saw each other because up until that moment, they had not seen each other for one week, which is part of the ritual of the Jewish religion. They saw each other for the first time and both of them related to me afterward, that the meaningfulness of seeing each other, and the fact that all of a sudden it was focused, it became a

reality. And he went over to her to place the veil, which up until that time had been back in her head with her face exposed, to place the veil over her face so that she would be ready for the ceremony itself. He did that, said very endearing, sweet, wonderful words to her, which I shall not repeat because they're private, so you have to use imagination. And put the veil over her face, and was danced with all of his attendants up to the space where he would then, walk down the aisle with his parents.

The bride then was blessed by her father, the groom's father, and the rabbi. And then she was also taken upstairs to proceed down to marry the groom. This was all happening in -- on the first floor of the American Museum of Immigration, in what is commonly known as the Baggage room, which is the room that the immigrants left their baggage and their possessions before they were led up the staircase onto the Registry Room.

LEVINE: Okay, so then they were in the Great Hall and there was a *hoopah* [ph] at one end.

RENEE: Yes, what we did was we used the benches that had been used by the immigrants as they were waiting their turn to be registered to be allowed into the United States. We had all of the benches facing west. And the *hoopah* [ph], which is the Jewish canopy, was set up on the west side. But the bride and the groom, although they walked down the aisle facing west, when they arrived under the canopy, which is comprised of four holes that are decorated with flowers and then *tallus* [ph] on top according to Jewish law, they turned around and faced east as is prescribed.

At one point during the ceremony, where he actually marries her and

places the ring on her finger, the park service was very kind and opened up the balcony doors behind them so they could step outside to be married under the stars, as is also prescribed that if you are married under the stars, you will multiply as the stars in the heaven. Therefore, they actually - the technical marriage did take place under the stars and they were facing east.

Under the *hoopah* [ph], was the bride's mother, the groom's mother, the maid of honor, who was the bride's sister, Jordanna Rachel Levine, and actually also the mother of the groom's mother, the bride's father, the groom's father, and the groom's brother. Also was part of the ceremony, there were seven *brahas* [ph] given out to various rabbis, who were close friends and or relatives of the bride and groom.

LEVINE: A *braha* [ph] being.

RENEE: A *braha* [ph] being a -- um, a – um, blessing, a blessing.

LEVINE: So they then, came up and gave their -- .

RENEE: Yes, they each one was called up, and each one came and – and gave the blessing to the bride and to the groom. Of course, at the end of the ceremony, even in the midst of great happiness, we have to remember that there was a tragedy and unhappiness in life and that is the significance of the breaking of the glass, which he broke to symbolize the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and he broke the glass and everyone says "Mazel Tov" and now they are man and wife.

LEVINE: And then tell about the rest of the celebration and particularly how it worked itself out at Ellis Island.

RENEE: How we -- how we used the Great Hall was as follows: we used the East -- the Eastern part of the Great Hall, we used it as the Chapel to perform our ceremony. We used screens to cover about one quarter of the room on the East side and one quarter of the room on the West side. The next section of the Great Hall that we used, we used to set up our dining tables and the following section of the Great Hall, the last section, the West section, we used as a space for dancing.

In a Jewish wedding, you need very large space for dancing because the dancing is not mixed, it is not couple dancing, the men dance with the men, and the women dance with the women. There is something that is used as a separation so that they really don't see each other as they celebrate in dance. And it was quite joyous. It was absolutely a joyous affair to see the men and the women dance, especially the men, who numbered about, I guess about sixty or seventy men, just dancing in-in-in circles, dancing in the Russian style, dancing in the Greek style, to use the dance as an expression of joy at the -- at the event, at the marriage of Joel and Eliasa [ph]. The women, the same. Simultaneously going on, our people who come to the wedding in-in -- bring to the wedding masks and funny-looking hats to entertain the bride and the groom, to make them smile, to -- a little bit of levity. But the dancing itself is a wonderful, wonderful source of joy and it's really, truly a celebration.

LEVINE: Why don't you mention what the music was?

RENEE: I don't know very much about the music.

LEVINE: I mean the components of the -- it was live.

RENEE: Oh, yes, yes, we had a wonderful, extraordinary orchestra. I think he

used -- there were five men. I -- offhand, I would have to look it up to tell what instruments they used, but the sound, actually the sound was incredible, which surprised me. I didn't expect the sound to be so wonderful. They played, in the dancing segment of the wedding, wonderful Jewish music, full of laughter and celebration. And -- but during the dinner, they played show tunes, which was very nice. It was a wonderful orchestra.

And we had fifteen tables set up for approximately eight, nine people in the Great Hall to serve dinner and we had a sit-down dinner and I didn't eat anything, so I can't attest to it personally because of all the excitement, but most of my guests called me up within the next few days to tell me how extraordinary the food was and it actually was a first, because this was the first time that they had a kosher caterer create a meal on Ellis Island. So I like to say, at this point, that I am personally and greatly indebted to the National Park Service, to Mike Conchlain [ph] particularly, for allowing me to-to -- allowing me to have the opportunity to-to -- to have this affair here at the museum on Ellis Island. I cannot tell you how indebted I am to him and to the National Park Service and to the rangers, who were on duty, who could not have been nicer or more helpful, really.

LEVINE: And how about the couple -- have you -- have they reported back as to their -- .

RENEE: Well, I must tell you, Janet, that -- that it was truly an extraordinary wedding, it was absolutely a magnificent setting. It had great historical significance. My father and my grandparents on my mother's side and my grandmother on my fathers side, as well as the grandparents of the groom on both sides, came to the United States through Ellis Island. And, growing up, of course I was very close to my father, but growing

up I was extremely close to my maternal grandmother, who lived a very long life and I was already a mother of two children when she died in 1973 at the ripe old age of 92. She came through Ellis Island and my father came through Ellis Island and for me to have my daughter married in the same spot that they came through, that where their presence was known, had such an emotional significance for me that it was like -- it was like having them both with me at the wedding. Yes.

And I have to say that working here at the museum, very often produces the same effect, the-the effect of the hearing the-the immigrants, the-the feelings of them being with you. It's an extraordinarily, wonderful experience to work on Ellis Island. I'm glad, I'm delighted, I'm thrilled, that I could share this experience with those people that I love and that are closest to me. It was so gratifying, so gratifying. The young couple are going to live a life of toer (?) learning and (laughs) they seem to be very much in love, very much devoted to one another. This was the marriage, very much of choice, this was not an arranged marriage in any way. They found each other. They loved each other from the moment that they met each other and actually they -- when they were married they knew each other, close to five months, about four and a half months. But it was definitely a marriage of love, and of choice, and it will be, I think, a very successful and happy marriage.

LEVINE: Can you say something, having worked other events, at Ellis Island, and now having had this first really large wedding at Ellis Island in your family, can you say something about, it had significance for the reasons you mentioned, for the wedding, can you say anything else about using for Ellis Island for events?

RENEE: I think that anybody that has an affair, an event on Ellis Island, is an extraordinary lucky person or corporation. One of the reasons that perhaps more individuals cannot have events on Ellis Island is because it is, well, it is expensive to have an event here. You -- in order to do so of course, you have to have it after the museum closes and when the museum closes, you must use the circle line ferry, which has an exclusive contract, I believe, to bring your guests over, and of course, you got to bring your guests back, so you have all the waiting time on the ferry to return your guests to the mainland. So it becomes very expensive, just to transport your guests back and forth.

There are other intricacies involved with the exclusivity of this service of the people who own the service contract for food on Ellis Island and the caterers, which is technical and I'm not familiar with the workings of that. So what I'm really trying to say, is that I think in their hearts and emotionally, so many people would want to have their, in the Jewish religion, a (?), which is their joyous event, on Ellis Island or individuals, or weddings of all denominations, and to confirmations, and private parties and anniversaries, but it becomes prohibitive for most people to do so. Those that are lucky enough, that can do it here, are truly very lucky because in the United States, we don't have that many monuments to our heritage and this one is such a significant monument, so to-to share it with all of these people who have gone through Ellis Island before us, is a -- is a really blessed event.

LEVINE: What about for corporations that are using it for their parties or whatever? Do you think that it's appropriate?

RENEE: I have worked at various affairs here for large corporations and also fundraisers. David Dinkins had a fundraiser here, so rather prominent. Hospitals had a fundraiser here. It's -- It's wonderful because most

times you have a fundraiser, you have it at some beautiful hotel and people come in and there's a laude schmorgausboard [ph] table and reception, and they go into dinner. But there's nothing to see, there's nothing to peek their interests at these places. Here, there's so much to interest them, the museum does keep the movie going continuously, while corporations for any event is going on here so that people can stop in at anytime to see the movie, which runs about thirty minutes, but they can see parts thereof. The Wall of Honor, which has been built by the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation and has the names of four hundred and twenty thousand immigrants on it and in October, we're adding the names of approximately eighty thousand more, is a great interest to tourists and guests of corporations who come here because many people have their parents' or their grandparents' names on the wall and affords them an opportunity to see it.

We also have computers in the baggage room, which tells every name that's on the wall and every donor who has sponsored a name on the wall so that you wouldn't be surprised. You come in the evening and all of these people are dressed exquisitely with magnificent jewelry and diamonds and Judith Lever pocketbooks and they stand there going through the computers, just like little children, trying to find their names on the wall and they're very excited when they find a relative's name or indeed the name of somebody they put on and they want to know where the wall is and no matter how cold (laughs) and clement the weather may be, they are there looking up the names.

There's the -- just the significance of the lower floor, the, of course the Baggage Room, the peopling of America, the story of immigration, which interests people tremendously and so along with their cocktail or their wine and perhaps their o'duerves, they have an opportunity, not

only to mingle socially, but to feel a little bit of what the museum represents and perhaps to silently thank some of these people who came over and their family being that these are such very successful people in American life.

Almost all of the affairs are on the second floor, which is known as the Registry Room, or the Great Hall, and depending on the size of the affair, and I've seen as many as seventeen hundred people, or perhaps less, perhaps a hundred people, depends on how they partition the room and use it as a dining hall. They do buffet service as well sit-down dinner; it depends on how you want to use the room. Both work beautifully in the Great Hall. The lights are dim, the tablecloths are beautifully broquated (?), the flowers are magnificent, and it's like a scene out of a movie, on the East, you have New York City and the skyline, glittering like diamonds, and on the West, you have the Statue of Liberty. There are very few places, I don't know if I can think of any places that would be as extraordinary as an affair in the Great Hall on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, I think this is a wonderful place to conclude. I think it's important to mark the significance of this first grand gala, a wedding that has been one of the events that Ellis Island is now used for. And on the other side of this tape, at a later date, we are going to tape you telling about your -- the role you've played in the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation. Kay, this Janet Levine on March 21st. 1995 at the Ellis Island Studio with Renee Levine and I'm signing off.

END SIDE A. BEGIN SIDE B.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine and its April twenty -- sorry, March 24th, 1995 and this is part B of the tape that I was doing with Renee Levine. We spent the first side talking about the wedding that Renee had for her daughter, here at Ellis Island, which was a first, and there'll be the published article from the New York Times and any other publications in the folder with Renee's name on it. Today we're gonna talk about the Wall of Honor and the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island foundation, which sponsors the Wall of Honor and was responsible for the reconstruction of Ellis Island. Renee has worked for the foundation since April 1993, so that's essentially for two years, and she is still working with them. Okay, Renee, why don't we start today by you saying your birth date.

RENEE: (Coughs) That wasn't a cough to stall. (Coughs) I was born on the 21 of August 1937.

LEVINE: And, when did you first -- do you remember what you heard about the foundation before you actually came to work for them?

RENEE: I had not been living in the United States. Actually, I was living on a Caribbean Island for four years. And so, I truly was not very familiar with the renovation of the Statue and the museum. Interestingly enough, a girlfriend of my daughter's, who she went to Carnegie Mellon with, was working here for the foundation, soliciting people and their interest in inscribing a relative's name on the wall, which essentially is how the foundation raised money to refurbish the museum. So, she had been working out here by herself and they needed, they really needed another person to work with her. She had recommended me on various occasions, but they were not so interested in meeting me because I believe that it was a question of my age and I believe that they really wanted a younger person because

she is twenty-eight years old and very vivacious and a former actress.

But they were not able to find somebody and so she pushed and pushed and finally they agreed to interview and they saw me at their executive offices on Vanderbilt Avenue. I was not hired the first time I went into the foundation and really the reason that he gave Alissa Paige, my daughter's girlfriend, was the fact that he was a little bit afraid of my age and the fact that he felt that I might not have enough stamina. So he did not hire me. About a month went by and they still hadn't decided on anybody when Alissa kept saying, "I cannot work alone. I cannot work alone. I must have somebody." So he said, "Okay, have her call me again," which I did. I called him again, I went into the office and he said he would give me a trail and see how it would work and if I would be able to sign up people for the wall.

The first day I worked for the foundation I remember was a Saturday and they threw me out there like a fish into water, really, I mean I was like maybe a fish into water, they threw me out there like somebody -- swim or sink. And I swam, that first Saturday we signed up twenty-nine people, I remember it perfectly, I was thrilled that I was that I was -- that I was having this kind of repaire with people and that was the most names they had ever signed up in one day. So I stayed. (laughs) And that's my career with the foundation.

LEVINE: Can you talk a little bit about the twists and turns of the foundation, since you have been working with it? I mean, they had one wall and then that was closed and then...

RENEE: The original wall that was put up by the foundation was a seawall. And It was the material, it was made out of was copper, it laid out flat amongst the wall that surrounds the waters and what happened

essentially was that the copper oxidized and a lot of people, I would assume predominantly school children really defaced the wall. They would trace their keys along the copper. And the wall was really in very bad shape. So simultaneous with that, they had gotten in a lot of requests, a lot more people wanted add names to the wall.

So, what they decided to do was use a much more durable material and they did, they used stainless steel. And they kind of copied, somewhat, duplicated the Vietnam Wall in Washington and Ralph Applebaum, very famous designer, is the designer of the wall. He designed the interiors of the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. So the wall is -- is really quite a beautiful circular structure which faces New York City or the skyline of New York City or the Statue of Liberty and has the names presently of four hundred and twenty thousand American Immigrants.

All of the names have been put on the wall, have been placed there either by the immigrant themselves or by children and or grandchildren of the immigrants. The minimum donation to put a name on the wall is one hundred dollars. We also have a place on the wall for those people who contribute a thousand dollars, those people who contribute five thousand dollars and those people who contribute ten thousand dollars. All the donations that are given to the foundation are tax deductible and they also have a matching gifts donation.

LEVINE: What's the nature of that? The matching gifts.

RENEE: That is if a corporation, if you work for a corporation and you give a donation, they can match it and receive a tax deduction for that amount of money.

LEVINE: So when a thousand, five thousand, or ten thousand dollar donor, is there a separate panel, are there separate panels for each of those categories?

RENEE: Yes, indeed. At the very, very, beginning of the wall, the very few first panels of - it begins the ten thousand dollar donations, now I'm not certain, I'd actually have to look at the application (laughs) after looking at so many thousands of them, it's called "Benefactors" - "Benefactors" -

LEVINE: "Patrons"?

RENEE: "Patrons and Leaders." The leaders are the thousand dollar donation. I cannot recall offhand whether the ten thousand are the Benefactors or the Patrons or vice versa. There's a sizeable amount of one thousand dollar donations but of course the bulk of the wall are people who have contributed one hundred dollars or more. Each name is a contribution of one hundred dollars, if you put a couple on the wall and you only put them on one line, it is a two hundred dollar donation. "John and Mary Jones Smith" are considered two names and a two hundred dollar donation.

LEVINE: But "The Smith Family" is a one line...

RENEE: "The Smith Family" is one line and is one hundred dollars. "The John Smith Family" is one hundred dollars. "The Mary Jones Smith Family" or "Mary Jones Smith" is also one hundred dollars. The - if you put in "The Jones DASH Smith Family", that would be a two hundred dollar donation.

LEVINE: Okay, can you think of any specific instances of people coming to put

names on the wall that stand out in your mind over the course of the time?

RENEE: There was, yes, for example, we're just discussing the thousand dollar donations, there was a very lovely, lovely, couple from Ohio and she came, her father had immigrated through Ellis Island and she came specifically to put his name on the wall and she wanted to make a thousand dollar donation. And so I explained to her that his name would be in the special place, but she said, "No, no." She did not want his name in the special place. She insisted that his name be placed with a hundred dollar donations because she felt that he was a man of the people all his life and he would not have wanted to be in a special place but she wanted to make this monetary contribution. So that was a very heart-warming story.

There was two ladies who, ah, who came out here. A sister of theirs had passed away and had left a small trust fund. The trust fund was to put the names of the relatives on the Wall of Honor. She had left a thousand dollars, specifically, to put the family names on the Wall of Honor because she knew nobody else could afford it. So they came out and spent the thousand dollars, put all ten family names on the wall.

There was a very lovely lady that came that also was certainly not a wealthy lady, with her daughter, who had come from Greece with her mother and her father and a brother. And she came to put the names on the wall with her daughter, who insisted that her mother place it as a family name for a hundred dollars but the mother had actually come to Ellis Island as a young girl and she was sick when she arrived. So they kept her here, she told me, for thirty days and she said nobody could've been kinder or nicer to her. They were absolutely

extraordinary and she felt such a gratitude toward them that she told her daughter, "No, no". Each name had to be separately on that wall. And so she did, she made a donation of four hundred dollars and put all four names on the wall.

There was -- there were two ladies who came and just thought that it was the most touching thing they had seen and they donated three hundred -- three thousand dollars each and put names on the wall. I'm talking about people who were not looking for tax deductions but people who just loved the people that they were honoring and no matter what or how inopportune for them, at that moment perhaps, to spend the money, did so anyway to truly honor those people that they loved. So I wish I could think of more but there were really lovely instances and sometimes you went home and you felt you loved the human (laughs) condition because there were people that were so kind and generous and grateful to those who would come before them.

LEVINE: The Wall of Honor is not just for people who came through Ellis Island. Do you have any sense of whether -- what maybe roughly proportion-wise, were there many people who put names on where their ancestors had not come through Ellis Island, but had been immigrants?

RENEE: I would say, roughly from my experience, that eighty -- eighty percent of the names that are on the Wall of Honor, are people who did come through Ellis Island. This seems to be a very strong connection between honoring those who came through Ellis Island and those that did not. But, indeed, there are people that have come to me and have been immigrants themselves who want to leave a little bit of themselves here and who put their own names on the wall.

I've had people from Nigeria put their names on their wall and I've had people from -- I had a lady come, was very interesting, as a matter of fact, she was a young woman in her twenties, a very, very good-looking woman, who came and with a very strong accent asked if she could put her uncle's name on the wall and I think she said he said he was not an immigrant. And I said he was not an immigrant through Ellis Island? I said, indeed she could. And she put his name on the wall and when she filled out the donor information, she was from Croatia. She was from Croatia, she was living there now and she paid me with a gold American Express card (laughs), which I thought was very interesting.

LEVINE: So you're saying there are some new immigrants too, more recent than Ellis Island who are putting their names on -- .

RENEE: There are a number of people from India, who put their names on the wall. I've had people from Lebanon, from Arab countries, who have put their names on the wall, quite a number, as a matter of fact. I've had many recent immigrants who really feel very proud about the fact that they are immigrants and want to put the name on the wall for future generations, for their children to see. Yes, indeed. I really feel that the immigrants who have come up to the desk who are recent immigrants, are as proud of their coming to this country as were the people who came in the early 1900s. Yes.

LEVINE: Would you talk a little bit about the special events that you have worked for the foundation and how does the Wall of Honor figure in to a special event, like maybe describe a corporation or a some instance where that would...

RENEE: Okay, the special events that occur on Ellis Island, occur after hours

and usually sponsored by corporations or indeed quite wealthy individuals because it's expensive to have a special event here in the evening. We work the events in the evening because people come and they're very interested, or maybe they would not have come to Ellis Island, under ordinary circumstances, but they're here and they're very proud to be here and when they see what the museum is about and they become a little bit -- I tell them a little bit about the wall, they usually want to add their ancestors to the wall.

Now, it's very interesting when they come to the special events because they're all very dressed and they're beautifully dressed with very expensive jewelry and I remember there was one lady who came to sign up her family for the wall and she had this exquisite, she didn't even have any room in her pocketbook because she had this exquisite Judith Leever pocketbook, one of these three thousand dollar egg-shelled kind of Tiffany, not Tiffany, a (?) type of eggs, beads, and peacocks and whatever that would open up, but she managed to keep a credit card in there and they come with the most exquisite jewelry and clothing and they're just as happy and as excited as those people who come during the day and donate a hundred dollars. They may pay with Platinum American Express cards, but they're there signing up with the same kind of enthusiasm. We do - we will for specially events get a number of names.

Corporations have special events, the hospitals -- various hospitals across the United States have had fundraising dinners here. David Dinkins had a fund-raising dinner here. I think there was seventeen hundred people. Mary Tyler Moore came out to the island. I remember one event that we had, they set up a stage and Tony Bennet entertained us. Yes, they're -- they're really -- the special events are particularly beautiful on Ellis Island and not only are they

physically beautiful but they are filled with all the historical significance. Everybody -- everybody relates to it. There are very few of us, really, who go back more than three generations and so for all of us, even for these very wealthy people who come in the evening really dressed in the night, I have found that it's always a mother or a father that has immigrated to this country.

LEVINE: Now, in these special events, are the galleries open? Do people go through the galleries at these -- .

RENEE: Yes, yes, when they do special events, the museum is open and indeed they can visit the museum. The movies -- the movies show continuously. I don't know if both theaters are open during it but I know one is always open. They may partake of the movie during the special events. The computers, of course, are on with the names that are on the Wall of Honor and the museum is open and they can go through it and view the exhibits. Yes.

LEVINE: So what do you expect now, as far as the foundation and the Wall of Honor, at this point in time?

RENEE: As I said at the beginning of this interview, the wall had four hundred and twenty thousand names on it. The wall was closed for nine months while the foundation was deciding whether or not to add a second wall because there were so many people that did not know about the first wall and wanted to add their relative's names.

LEVINE: Do you know when that was, Renee?

RENEE: The -- it was closed. The registration was closed in April of 1992. They -- they put up this wall that exists now, January of 1993 and it

was at that time that they agreed to take additional names for a second wall, what they call phase two. And they agreed that there would be seventy-five thousand new names added to the wall. Well, as of last Tuesday, which I think was the first day of spring, April 21st.

LEVINE: March.

RENEE: (laughs) March 21st. They had reached that number and indeed did not have any room left on the wall. So they closed the registration for phase two. Now, since Tuesday, we have taken probably a hundred or two hundred applications from people who still wish to put a name on the wall and if the foundation decided they want to add a phase three, then these people will be lucky enough to have their names on the wall. At this point, it is still unclear whether the foundation will decide to enter into phase three and put a new wall up.

I would like to add that in the course of my taking applications for the wall, that I would say the largest group -- you have not asked me this question, but I'm answering it anyways -- the largest of group of immigrants that have added names to the wall, in my experience, have been the Italians. The Italians cannot stop by and know that they can put a mother and a father on the wall and not do so. So it has been my experience that they are the ones in the largest numbers to put a name on the wall, followed by the Jewish people, who also obviously have very strong family ties and will, indeed, always put a mother or a father or grandparents on a wall. The group that is not so large in number because they are not so large in number as a group but who always put a family member on the wall and that is the Armenian people. They number few, but if you have a hundred Armenians, you will have a hundred names. If you have two hundred Armenians, you will have two hundred names. Their percentage is probably a hundred percent.

The other ethnic groups that add names to the wall are the Greeks and the Irish and then of course, here and there, you get people from England and Wales, sometimes France and not very much from France, not very much from Holland, a little bit more from Holland than from France, most of those from Eastern Europe, Poland and Russia were -- I make that part of the Jews because they were the ones that came from that part of Europe.

LEVINE: Could you say, before we close, who it is that you report to at the foundation and then who it is that you worked with here.

RENEE: I worked with Alissa Paige, who was the young lady that brought me in. I worked with David Dyko [ph], who doesn't solicit names on the wall, he kind of relieves us when we go to lunch, he sort or manage the office for us. There was a very nice girl, who came in on weekends to help us by the name of Linda Steelwagon. The people -- those of us who worked here on Ellis Island were really separate and apart from the foundation, whose main office is on Vanderbilt Avenue, in Manhattan. My direct superior is Carl Anderson. He is the administrator of the foundation and he is the one that I had all of my dealings with. I did not have dealings with anybody else unless it was something special like Peg, who does publicity for the foundation and she would come out and ask me to help in some way. But my direct superior is Carl Anderson.

LEVINE: Would you like to say anything about your, the question of your stamina (laughs) and also any really big days. Was that first day your biggest day?

RENEE: No. The busiest day that we ever had on Ellis Island was a Sunday

that Alissa Paige and I worked together. And we wound up with a total of ninety-six names between us. It was the busiest and the most exciting day that we had. I, myself have had very busy days where I solicited maybe fifty, sixty names on my own, which is -- which has been constantly talking to people and writing down. And the most exciting evening event that I ever did was the American Chapter of Lawyers. I don't remember the exact name of it. The Bar Association or the American Bar Association, I think that was the name of the lawyers and it was just so delightful to see all of these magnificently-dressed people, trying to elbow their way to my desk, so that they can put their immigrant relatives names on the wall, they all look very waspy to me (laughs) but they had somewhere turned in their immigrant fathers and mothers. I signed up a lot of people that night. It was a very, very exciting night. We have had some wonderfully busy days here and have done really quite well, I think in our relationships with people that have come.

The other thing I wish to say, for the record, is that when people come from California, they seem very happy to sign up an immigrant relative and when I speak to them a little bit more, I always find that they are originally from New York (laughs) and so it's kind of like leaving a little bit of themselves here in New York after making that big move out to sunny California. So it's been fun. I have truly, truly enjoyed this job. I have spent many, many, many happy days here. I've met wonderful people at the museum staff and no, I think that I have very good stamina. (laughs) I am the one remaining (laughs). I remain. That's it.

LEVINE: Well, you also give a very wonderful interview. I want to thank you very much. I've been speaking with Renee Levine, who has been employed by the foundation of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and has been signing up people for the Wall of Honor. And on the flip side of this

EI-592/LEVINE

tape we have Renee talking about her daughter, Joel's, wedding which was held here at Ellis Island. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on March 24th, 1995 in the Ellis Island Studio and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW