

**EI-063**

**MORRIS SPIEGLER**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine, I'm here with the National Park Service at Ellis Island with Mr. Morris Spiegler, who came through Ellis Island in November 1925 from Poland when he was twelve years old.

SPIEGLER: Right.

LEVINE: Well, welcome, Mr. Spiegler.

SPIEGLER: How do you do? Nice to be here.

LEVINE: Good. I want to ask you first where you were coming from when you came to the United States.

SPIEGLER: I came from Poland.

LEVINE: And what town in Poland?

SPIEGLER: There were two towns. First I was born in Bendzin, B-E-N-D-Z-I-N. Then, see; let's start a little bit before that, the beginning, after my birth. When I was three years old my father died. He was twenty-eight. And my mother and I, you know, we had, she had two children, my sister and myself. She moved in with us to her parents. My grandfather was a baker, and she helped in the business, my mother.

LEVINE: Okay. Maybe it would be helpful if you said what your sister's name is, or was.

SPIEGLER: My sister was, her name was Gerry.

LEVINE: Gerry. And your mother's name?

SPIEGLER: My mother, uh, Fanny.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's maiden name?

SPIEGLER: Sheiowitz.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

SPIEGLER: That's a big problem. (They laugh) I can write it. (He pauses to write)  
Sheiowitz.

LEVINE: Sheiowitz. And then your grandparents, what were their names?

SPIEGLER: Their names?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SPIEGLER: His name was Akiva, his Hebrew name, Akiva. And my grandmother's  
name, Hannah.

LEVINE: Hannah. And they were Sheiowitz.

SPIEGLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, so you moved, you and your sister moved in . . .

SPIEGLER: And my mother, moved in with them. At the same time, living with them  
were three of my cousins, her sister, my mother's sister and her three  
children. Their father, and her husband, was in America. In those days  
the man would go to America, find a job, save some money, and bring his  
wife and children over. But in this particular case, after my father died and

my mother moved in with us, her sister died. So, and in the meantime her husband sent papers for my aunt to bring the three children over here to America. So instead they decided, after my father died and my aunt died, they decided, I guess my grandparents had something to do with that decision, that my mother take them here instead of her sister to their father, to bring the children over. And she did that, and they got married here. She married her brother-in-law, and they had a little boy after the marriage. So we were his, hers and theirs.

LEVINE: I see. So your mother came over with her three, your three cousins and your sister and yourself.

SPIEGLER: No.

LEVINE: No.

SPIEGLER: She came here with my three cousins, one a boy and two girls, and herself. And left the two of us, my sister and me, with her parents.

LEVINE: I see, I see.

SPIEGLER: Now, as I said before, my grandparents had a bakery. My grandfather had a bakery in the rear of the building, and a store to sell the merchandise. But they were getting old, my grandparents. They were, I guess, in their early eighties by that time. And the Polish government wanted them to modernize the bakery for health reasons. Now, at their age it didn't make any sense for them to do anything. So they decided to

go back to the shtetel that they came from, both of them, another part of Poland, a tiny little village with no sidewalks and electricity or anything, and they took us with them, my sister and me. The conditions were very bad. We lived in a little room with two beds. In order to get into bed you had to walk sideways it was so narrow. They had one window at the end, in back of the bed, beds, and in the wintertime those shutters were closed and the windows were closed. Under one bed they had coal for the whole winter. Under the other bed they had potatoes the whole winter. That was the main stay of the food, bread and potatoes.

LEVINE: So it was your grandmother and grandfather and your sister and you.

SPIEGLER: That's right.

LEVINE: Living in how many rooms?

SPIEGLER: One tiny, little room.

LEVINE: Oh, one little room.

SPIEGLER: And the other end was a little stove and a little table to eat, and that's about it. I could not live like that, and I was then, when my mother left me, I was eight years old and my sister was six. When we lived in Bendzin I didn't mind it too much because I was brought up there in that big, it was a big city. But that little shtetel, and that room that we were living in, I couldn't take it. One night, on a Friday night, my sister, who was a sickly child as it is, asphyxiated, got asphyxiated with the gas fumes from the

coal. My grandmother lit the Friday night candles and she had big candles and they took up the oxygen in the room. There was no air coming in. So I remember one Friday night something was happening to my sister. She slept with Grandma, and I slept with Grandpa. And she woke up Grandpa, my grandmother, and she showed him what was happening. He picked her up and started slapping her around until he brought her back to life. I could not live like that any more, so I became a street kid.

LEVINE: You were about nine years old then?

SPIEGLER: I was about nine or ten, close to ten. In between nine or ten. So I used to get hitches on wagons. In those days it was horse and wagons. There was a couple living right next to my grandpa and grandma in that little shtetel. His livelihood was, he has a team of horses and a wagon and every week he would bring farm stuff from the little shtetels around there to Bendzin, to the big city, and deliver that, and then take hardware, whatever they needed in the small town, bring it back.

So he would start Sunday morning, get that, and drive day and night with a team of horses. And we would get to Bendzin around Wednesday morning. And then Wednesday afternoon he'd start back, and get there just in time before Friday night. Just like Fiddler on the Roof, actually. And, by the way, the cabin, or whatever you want to call it, I didn't call it a house or an apartment, was very difficult. So I decided, being I had aunts and uncles in the big city, I used to take rides with him. And I'd disappear. My grandparents knew where I was at the time. They knew I took off to go back to where I came from. I would live with aunts and uncles. One

was very poor. They were starving. And some of them got, did have money, or did have a good business, they didn't want to bother with me. I was in their way. That uncle and aunt had around eight children, and they didn't need a ninth one. So I was a wandering kid. And I, as I said, I became a street kid. I became a wise guy. I stole food. I did anything I could to survive.

LEVINE: So how was the decision made that you and your sister would come, then, to this country?

SPIEGLER: Decision? Well, when my mother was here five years after she was married, she became a citizen. She sent for us. That's why the two of us came alone. And, as I said before, my sister was a sick child, all alone, and that trip across the ocean was devastating to her. We had a little cabin on the bottom of the boat, just a bottom bunk and an upper bunk. I don't think she ever got out of her bunk. She couldn't hold food down. I had to take care of her. I didn't want to ask for help from a doctor on the boat, if there was one, I don't know, because I was afraid that they'll send us back. So I had to help her all I could do.

LEVINE: Well, just, before we get on to the boat trip, I mean, being a street kid in Poland at that time, were you with other kids? Did you hang around with other kids, or were you . . .

SPIEGLER: No, just two kids, two brothers. They were my cousins, first cousins. They were so poor that they had to go around, scrounge around the garbage cans for potato peels so that their mother could make potato

soup with the peels. That's how bad off they were. And they were nice to me. But they couldn't afford to feed me, either. And the ones that had money, that had businesses, they didn't want to be bothered with me. So this was the beginning. I had a rough beginning.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, what did you think, when your mother sent for you and your sister to come, do you remember what you felt, or thought about?

SPIEGLER: Terrific. To get back, to America, of course. As a matter of fact, once my mother sent me a dollar for Hanukkah. I guarded that dollar with my life because I figured somebody's going to take it away from me, especially that poor family that could use a dollar to buy food. And they taught me how to hide it in my cap so that nobody would think of taking it away from me. As poor as they were, they were nice to me, but they couldn't afford to help in any way. So, and then I, this, I got one block in my mind. I don't remember how I got to that, it was a railroad town where I had an aunt, a blood aunt, one of my father's sisters, or the only sister he had. I got to that place. Now, they were well-to-do people. They had a home, a nice home, and everything. But I don't remember, I have a block there, how did I get there. Because that team of horses and the wagon did not go that direction at all. So maybe I used that dollar to get a ticket with the railroad, because I don't remember how I spent that dollar, so that could be it. Now, my biggest disappointment, now this, here is my blood aunt, my father's sister, they had a large family and they had a large house. But me, there was no room, like Christ, there was no room in the . . .

LEVINE: Inn, yeah.

SPIEGLER: So they had a couch in the living room. In those days there was, they had straw in there instead of what they have now. And you'd think that they'd let me sleep on the couch. No. They took a potato sack, filled it with straw, and put it near the door, and that's where I slept every night. They made me work for whatever food they gave me. I had to walk about two or three miles from that town; it was a railroad town with one main street. I had to walk out to the farm for them to milk the cow into their dish, into a long, what do you call it, jar, a tremendous jar. The jar was almost longer than me. And I had to go there and bring back the milk.

And I had to go through all these Polish farms, and the kids threatening me, throwing stones at me, and calling me "Zyd palcho." In Polish that means, "Jew louse." And I felt miserable. I needed money to buy candy to give them to stay away from me, to let me alone. And I had it even tougher than I ever had it before. And I didn't know how to get out of that town. So I had to stay there until a miracle happened. One of my cousins came there to pick me up and bring me back to Bendzin. My mother had sent papers for me to come to America. It's like going out from jail, or a camp, some kind of concentration camp. I never had life that miserable.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were at the bottom of the pits.

SPIEGLER: I was at the bottom.

LEVINE: When the papers came from your mother for you to leave.

SPIEGLER: Came, oh, when I saw those papers and I, and I knew we were going to America, a new life. But when I came here it wasn't that way either.

LEVINE: Well, let's say, now, when you got the papers, where did you go to get the ship.

SPIEGLER: Copenhagen.

LEVINE: Now, how did you get from Poland to Copenhagen?

SPIEGLER: Now, this is what happened. This particular cousin of mine was very nice. He had to take us to Warsaw, the capital of Poland, to get the Polish passports and everything. And there I had another cousin, a great cousin, who lived in Warsaw. And for the first time in my life I saw a tall building and a bathroom in the apartment. I never saw this in my life.

LEVINE: Did you have outhouses? Was that the usual?

SPIEGLER: Now, in Bendzin they had outhouses. When I lived in Pinchim in that little shtetel with my grandparents, they didn't have that either. You had to go out in the fields. Late at night, whenever, you had to go out in the fields. It was really, try and visualize that. Not, there is no street, all mud. Very religious people, and superstitious people. It was, no electricity, no nothing, in that little tiny room that we lived in.

LEVINE: Did you have a religious life when you were in Poland?

SPIEGLER: Yes. As a matter of fact, before my mother left me, I was eight when she left me. I was going to a, you can call it a parochial school, a Hebrew school where you learn to be a rabbi. They teach you mostly religion, the Torah and whatever, and also general education too, like parochial school, arithmetic and Polish. So, but I lasted there about two years, I think. After my mother left and my parents were going to move back to that shtetel where they came from and give up the bakery, my life changed completely, including my religion too.

LEVINE: How did . . .

SPIEGLER: My religion? How did it? When I came to this country I read Of Human Bondage. A book made me change my mind. I didn't change my religion, but it changed my mind about religion.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's hold that till we get you over the ocean and to this country, okay.

SPIEGLER: Now, the trip was absolutely miserable. I think that this boat that takes us out here to Ellis Island is much bigger than the boat I came across the Atlantic.

LEVINE: Really. Do you remember the name of that boat?

SPIEGLER: Estonia.

LEVINE: Estonia. And from Copenhagen.

SPIEGLER: From Copenhagen, yes.

LEVINE: Now, you had said before, you got to Warsaw first, where you saw the first big building.

SPIEGLER: That's right. We got our papers, and from there we took the railroad to Copenhagen, Denmark. We were going west.

LEVINE: And what was that like, that train ride?

SPIEGLER: Nice. The railroad was nice, nothing bad about it. And I was so happy that even if it was a nothing railroad I would still be happy just to get out of that type of life and come here.

LEVINE: Now, how did your sister feel? Do you remember?

SPIEGLER: My sister was a very funny person. She was a complete introvert, directly the opposite of me. And she took beatings. I mean, she lived with those, under those conditions. I was able to get away from it. She couldn't. And I felt sorry for her.

LEVINE: Were you protective of your sister?

SPIEGLER: Yes, of course.

LEVINE: When you were . . .

SPIEGLER: At that time, sure. Because on the boat I saw that she was so sick, and I had to figure out ways to keep her from dehydrating. Of course, I never knew that word then or anything, but common sense told me that she can't throw up constantly and still survive that trip. And another thing, I heard that the ocean is vast, but what I saw was more than vast. It took almost three weeks, and I never thought that trip was going to make it to the shores of this country. At night she was rocking so badly I thought she's going to fall apart. But me, for some peculiar reason, I can't even swim. But I was not sick on the boat at all. I wasn't sick at all. In the morning I would be the only one in the dining room, if you want to call it a dining room, to eat breakfast. There was nobody there but me. And I had all the waiters wait on me, because they couldn't believe it, that I could come out and eat.

LEVINE: What were the conditions like on the ship? What about the accommodations, the sleeping arrangements, the dining room?

SPIEGLER: The accommodations were, as I said, a little tiny cabin about the size from here to here (he indicates) with an upper and lower.

LEVINE: So just about big enough for the bunks.

SPIEGLER: And that's about it. That's about it. And I climbed up there. I didn't mind. And she was in the bottom. And, as I said, I had to try and keep her alive.

LEVINE: And what about the food? What was the food like?

SPIEGLER: The food, I'll tell you, I couldn't care what they feed me as long as they fed me. I don't remember exactly how the food was. The first good food I ate was in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Well, let's get, do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

SPIEGLER: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

SPIEGLER: See, there's another thing. I was interviewed recently. I'm not going to mention who the reporter or what the newspaper was. It was a magazine publisher. He asked me the same question, how did I feel when I saw the Statue of Liberty? My answer was I didn't see the Statue of Liberty. I was so small, I was thirteen years old, or twelve years old, whichever, and I was, when I came here I was about fifty-six to fifty-eight pounds. I was very tiny.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

SPIEGLER: I was very tiny. I saw a lot of people running up to the top deck, and I ran also. And by the time I got up there you couldn't get near the rail to see the Statue of Liberty, so I went opposite and I saw the torch. And even if I did see the Statue of Liberty, it wouldn't have meant anything to me

anyway. I didn't know the history of this country. I didn't know what it stood for. And I told that to the reporter on the phone. He called me and interviewed me. He wrote the most beautiful article, but it was all a lie. He wrote, and I never told him that. I told him just what I told you now. But he wrote, "I took my little sister by the hand and took her up to see the Statue of Liberty and we were both delighted." He made up a beautiful story that I never told him. Oh, when he asked me that question, and I forgot that, I asked him on the phone, I says, "Do you want the truth, or you want me to dramatize it?" He said, "Of course I want the truth." So I told him the truth, that I didn't see, except the torch. Because I was happy when the boat finally landed and I could get her out of the bunk, and that's where they took her to the hospital.

LEVINE: At Ellis.

SPIEGLER: They used to, yeah, on Ellis Island. Because I walked up fine, she was in front of me, and she was struggling to walk up the steps. They took her out and took her to the hospital.

LEVINE: Can you remember your first impression of Ellis Island, when you came to Ellis Island and when you got off?

SPIEGLER: The impression was, anything would have been better than what I had. But Ellis Island, first of all, and I've heard that said by other people, but I made that remark before other people did. For the first time in my life I saw white bread, and I loved it, and I ate a lot of it. The tables were clean. The food was good. And I had no complaints about anything, except

wanting to go with my family. Don't forget that my brothers and sisters, my first cousins, actually, but we grew up together in the same household, in our grandparents' household. So I was glad to see them.

LEVINE: Now, did they come, were they, did they come to Ellis Island to meet you?

SPIEGLER: No, they didn't. Oh, and by the way, my mother and the three cousins, her three nephews and nieces that she brought here, they did not come to Ellis Island. Because if you travel first class, the boat will let you off in Manhattan, I think it was. They did not come through Ellis Island, but we did. My mother, things didn't go too well financially with the family. My stepfather was a millinery operator that made ladies hats. In those days ladies hats were very popular, and he worked in a sweatshop. But as the styles, the women went away from wearing hats; he had less and less work.

So when I came to this country in 1925, about 1927 or '28 and the crash was in '29, the Depression, we were suffering very badly. We were six children now, his, hers and theirs, and my stepfather and my mother, eight people to feed. So every child except my sister and my young, my half-brother, every one had to go out and do something to bring in some money. Because our stepfather couldn't, he maybe had one or two days' work. That's about all. And it was rough going. In those days, I don't know if you ever heard of it, they used to have wet wash laundries. You'd bring your dirty laundry down to the wet wash. They'll wash it, but they wouldn't deliver it. So they'd give a kid five cents to bring the wet wash. The wet wash laundry was heavier than me, and I used to walk up two

and three flights of steps to make a nickel, and so did my brother, or half-brother, whatever. No, no, no, my half-brother didn't work yet. He was too small. My cousin who became my brother, right.

LEVINE: Now, where did you settle? Where did you go when you got here to your mother?

SPIEGLER: On Rockaway Avenue in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SPIEGLER: That was the first; in those days they moved a lot because there were a lot of empty apartments. So the landlords would give you one or two months concession to induce you to move and take their apartment. So we kept moving constantly. And it was rough going. It was really tough.

LEVINE: Did you go to school at all once you got here?

SPIEGLER: No, there's another thing. Yes, my mother raised me in school. But I was older than all the kids, children, in the class. They kept promoting me every few weeks. Finally I had to quit school and go to work. When I was seventeen I got my regular working papers. In the summer time you used to get temporary working papers so I can work and help the family. Every child had to do something to bring in some money and give it to Mom.

LEVINE: So you were working while you were going to school.

SPIEGLER: Going to school. Now, this was my next thing that I almost came to a nervous breakdown. I got a job. When I was seventeen I got my regular working papers. I got a job with a hosiery jobber on 30th and Fifth Avenue, 30th Street and Fifth Avenue. And I had, I had to, I started going to high school at night. I finished grammar school, and at night I started going to high school.

LEVINE: Uh, Mr. Spiegler, I think we'll stop here so the tape can be turned over, because I don't want to miss this.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you want to continue, Mr. Spiegler, about when you got your working papers when you were seventeen?

SPIEGLER: Yeah. Now, I started going to evening high school. I didn't particularly want to do it, but my mother yelled and screamed at me she wanted me to get an education, which is the best thing she ever did for me. I got a job on 30th and Fifth, Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, working fifty-three hours a week, six days, five days nine hours and Saturday, a big break, eight hours. And I, in those days I started off with high school at night. The high school was in Brooklyn on Pennsylvania Avenue, East New York area, past Brownsville. It's like a ghetto. Most of the people there were Jewish. So I would quit, at six o'clock, take the subway home, and go

straight to night school. Then I'd come home, I don't know, about ten, ten-thirty or something at night. My mother would have dinner for me. I'd go to sleep, get up the next morning around six, and start the day all over.

This lasted five years, high school. I got my diploma and without bragging I had the highest mark of the English regents of the whole school, not the class, of the whole school. I had the highest mark of the English regents. I graduated high school, and then I started with City College of New York, Lexington and 23rd. Now, being I was on Fifth and 30th Street it made it a little easier. So I'd get out at six o'clock. Oh, and by the way, I told you I was working fifty-three hours for twelve dollars a week. My mother got ten and I got two dollars for carfare, and she'd give me along a sandwich. And carfare was a nickel a ride in those days. So five difficult years with running to high school and everything, and I made it.

Then I registered in City College where, the run is now, then I had to run from 30th and Fifth to Lexington and 23rd. At six o'clock I'd have to run out. We had a clock on the wall. And my employer said, "Where's the fire?" Very sarcastically. I says, "Mister," I forgot his name. I said, I told him I've got to be there around six thirty, I've got to grab a frankfurter or something and eat and make my first class. He says, "You can't do both. You can't work and go to school." But he didn't fire me anyway. It was just a threat. Then I did two years of City College. That makes it seven years. After the two years I knew I had enough. I was getting, I knew I was ready for a nervous breakdown between working so hard, and on Sunday was the only day I was free, I had to do homework. When I went

to City College I took commercial law and accounting.

LEVINE: So then how did you, after two years you decided to stop.

SPIEGLER: That was it. That was it. Then these people, well, there was two reasons why I had to quit. First, I was afraid of getting a nervous breakdown, which was very obvious. I just couldn't take it any more. And secondly, one of the owners of the partners in that firm took a liking to me and wanted to send me on the road selling.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, let's just backtrack here to Ellis Island and when you were, when you were detained here, just so we get that sequence before we . . .

SPIEGLER: Well, as I said, we came here; it took us about two-and-a-half to three weeks, the voyage, that terrible voyage. And we came here; she was taken to the hospital right away.

LEVINE: And how long was she, were you detained, then?

SPIEGLER: I would say about two weeks. I don't remember exactly. It was over a week.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did you do while you were here for that length of time?

SPIEGLER: I just eat, and watch for my mother. She used to come every day to see me. She wasn't permitted on the premises. She couldn't come in here.

But she used to push through Hershey bars to me, and she, but they wouldn't let her in even to see my sister, either. So . . .

LEVINE: And was there any kind of entertainment here?

SPIEGLER: Not that I know of, no. I wouldn't be interested in entertainment or anything. I was just happy to be fed, to eat good food and sit at a table for a change. I never had the privilege of sitting at anybody's table.

LEVINE: Really. And do you remember anything about the food?

SPIEGLER: The food? It was fairly good, especially the white bread. (He laughs) I couldn't get enough of it. It was good, it was clean, and the people, I got along with people. See, I've always been an extrovert. Not my sister.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Right. Were you speaking any English at that time?

SPIEGLER: No. The only word I knew was "dollar." I spoke mostly Yiddish.

LEVINE: I see. Were there people, then, who could speak Yiddish that you could communicate with?

SPIEGLER: Yiddish, that's right. Mostly Yiddish was spoken. Yeah. So I had no problem there. And, but English I didn't know a word. But I made up my mind I would speak English and speak it well.

LEVINE: And then, so then do you remember when you were informed that you

would be able to leave Ellis Island?

SPIEGLER: Yes, when she was sent back from the hospital. From the hospital I was notified. Then we called, then our mother came anyway. She come and she took us off the island. And that was about it.

LEVINE: And can you remember your first impression of New York?

SPIEGLER: The first impression was this. First of all, it was in the wintertime. It was cold. And I, my mother took us by subway from Manhattan to Brooklyn. I never saw this in my life, a subway. How a railroad could go underneath the ground is beyond me. And everything I saw I loved. But the apartment we had was not the nicest in the world. We were just getting along. And overcrowded, because we were six children and two grownups, the parents.

LEVINE: And what was the apartment like as far as size and accommodations?

SPIEGLER: The first apartment on Rockaway Avenue, I think we had three bedrooms, two or three bedrooms. In fact, my parents would sleep in the living room. And being they were boys and girls, we had to sleep separate rooms. So I think it was adequate. And I remember the first apartment we had on Rockaway Avenue, there was no toilet on the inside, but running water they had. Then the next apartment they took there was an inside bathroom already. No shower or anything, a tub. And that's just about it. We were poor.

LEVINE: Now, was your family religious at all, your mother, stepfather?

SPIEGLER: Yes, they were religious. Yeah, they more or less. Either they were religious or they just by habit did things that they were taught to do in the religion.

LEVINE: So in other words they kept observances of religious holidays.

SPIEGLER: Yeah. They were observant, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, you mentioned earlier that you changed your attitude toward religion once you read Of Human Bondage.

SPIEGLER: Yes. After reading Of Human Bondage, you know, I had questions, a lot of questions in my mind about religion per se, any religion. Did you ever see that movie Of Human Bondage? It's before your time. Or read the book?

LEVINE: I read the book, yes.

SPIEGLER: It's about a Catholic orphan. He's in an orphanage place, and he has a clubfoot. And the children would laugh at him, ridicule him. And every night he went, before he went to sleep he prayed to God, "Let me wake up normal like the other boys." And nothing ever happened. Then I started thinking, and I read anything I could get a hold of. I was an avid reader, because I wanted to learn the English language, and I also wanted to assimilate. Because I had an incident where before I got that job with the

hosiery jobber, I decided rather than go to these cheap employment agencies on Sixth Avenue, I wanted to go to more of a WASP agency, maybe I could get a better job. Because I was studying, I was reading, I was able to speak well. This woman interviewed me. In those days they had no civil laws. And went along, asked me questions, and I answered them. Then she asked me religion. I said, "I'm Hebrew." I don't know why I didn't say Jewish. (He laughs) She tore it up. She says, "We have no jobs for you." And that was a setback for me. It's understandable.

LEVINE: So does that tie in with the reading Of Human Bondage?

SPIEGLER: Yeah. Everything, I read so many things, and I started questioning a lot of things. I'm not an atheist, by the way. I never was. But I can't understand a lot of things. Like my sister, before she died she suffered so much. She was blind about two or three years before she died. She was an artist. She painted beautiful pictures. Of course, she always kept to herself. And the only good thing the good Lord gave her was a terrific husband. He was Irish Catholic. And I don't think the guy was a human being. He was a saint to be able to get along with my sister, and he stood by her to the very last day of her life.

LEVINE: So how, looking back on your coming and, I assume you became a citizen . . .

SPIEGLER: No. I automatically became a citizen because I came as a minor on my mother's papers. But I wasn't happy with that. I started voting on her papers, but I heard when you serve in the armed forces you automatically

became a citizen. And I served three years during World War II, and then I asked, I went to the Attorney General of the Armed Forces. I wanted to get my own papers. So he told me, he says, "You're a citizen twice now, because you served in the armed forces, you came as a minor, but if you want derivative papers go to the naturalization and immigration bureau and you can get it from them." So I did, and I got my own papers. So I'm a citizen three times over. And I'll tell you, this is the best country in the world. With all its faults, and there are faults, nothing's perfect, I'd rather be here than anywhere's else. What can I say? And now the older I get the more I see everything's going my way. Even here, what's happening right now with Ellis Island?

LEVINE: What do you mean?

SPIEGLER: It happened, it's unbelievable how things are falling my way. When, in 1976 I had to retire because I had bleeding ulcers and I just, I was selling women's shoes, high fashion women's shoes.

LEVINE: Is that what you did mostly as a profession, as a career?

SPIEGLER: Not mostly. For eighteen years I worked for hosiery manufacturer who was later bought out by Kaiser Roth. But this was Mosier Hosiery, it was before your days. And I was in charge of three departments, around sixty-five people. For eighteen years I worked at that. And also at the same time, because they, we were open five days a week. But I had to do something else, to earn more money or whatever. So I got myself a job on Saturdays selling women's shoes as a sideline. So when they were

bought out by Kaiser Roth in the early fifties, I think it was 1953, I got a steady job selling women's shoes by that time, and I remained. And now I'm still working for a shoe store. I retired in 1976 because I was a very sick man. They removed half of my stomach. I'm operating with half a stomach now. And in 1978, two years later, I started working for Selby Footwear in Manhasset, and I'm still working there part-time, three days a week.

LEVINE: I see.

SPIEGLER: Only five hours a day, that's all I work. And I love it.

LEVINE: When you say everything's going your way now . . .

SPIEGLER: Everything. When we moved, I sold my house. We lived in a home for twenty-five years, we bought from the builder when they were building them, under the G.I. Bill. It was a beautiful, wonderful home. But then, after my daughter got married and my father-in-law, who lived with us, died. So I told my wife, I said, "Why do we need three bedrooms? Let's sell the house. We'll make a nice profit. And let's move to Great Neck." Because I got the job in Great Neck with Selby Shoes. So she agreed. We sold the house. I moved to Great Neck. Then up until that point nobody, in twenty-five years, nobody really knew me. I was Henrietta's husband. That's all they knew about me, that I was Henrietta's husband.

When we came to Great Neck I decided she would become my wife, I'd be known. I became an actor. I went to an audition for, they had a write-up

in The Great Neck Record about this, the Great Neck House, which is run by the Parks Department, were running two shows a year. So I decided to go there and I'm going to two auditions. But the director told me everybody's cast already and we're finished with this show. So I asked him, "Would you mind if I come around and watch the rehearsals?" He says, "No, not at all. You can come." So I did. One night he threw the script at me. He said, "As long as you're going to hang around, prompt the actors and help me." So I did. So if a male actor would not show up going into rehearsal, I would read for him. And I must have read so well that the next show he did he auditioned, he just told me to read one small paragraph, and I did.

And there were twenty-five people auditioning that night. He never gave the parts away. He took their phone numbers. He says, "You may hear from me." Another man and myself, he gave us the scripts, he says, "The two of you got the parts." He was the king in The Ugly Duckling. It was an old play. "He's the king, and Morris, you'll be his chancellor." So we took the scripts. And he says, "Come back Monday, we're going to start rehearsals." That lasted ten years. We did two shows a year, one-act shows or two-act shows a year, twice a year. And I became an actor. And he never auditioned me after that. And I even asked him, years later, Moshe, he's an Israeli director, I said, "Moshe, was that a legitimate audition the first time?" He says, "No, it wasn't. I pre-casted you. I knew you were going to be able to do the part." So then I also belonged to the Great Neck Theater Guild where they charge admission, and I did (?) for them. I had a terrific part in it, and I went over beautifully.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

SPIEGLER: But now the Great Neck House cut out the shows. They do movies now every weekend, so no more live shows. But now I got to, a funny thing happened. I should have brought it with me to show you. A week ago, no, two weeks ago, I was on jury duty for the whole week in Criminal Court in Mineola, Long Island. And I got a card three days ago. They want me to audition for The Twelve Angry Men at the Levittown, out on the island. They heard about me, they knew about me, they want me to come and audition. So I called the director and I told him, "You couldn't have sent me that card in a better time. I just got finished with jury duty." And The Twelve Angry Men is all about a jury, and Henry Fonda was the star in that. So I'm going to audition for them.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Good luck.

SPIEGLER: So I said my life changed completely. Everybody knows me in Great Neck. I was on television four times. Twice for NBC, once Fox-5 and one for the Italian government. They sent a tape to Italy, and then they sent me back four tapes. Yeah, so I've been around.

LEVINE: We'll give you a tape of today, also.

SPIEGLER: And now this, and now this.

LEVINE: Let me just quickly, when did you meet your wife, Henrietta? When?

SPIEGLER: Oh, that's a different story. Now, I was divorced during the war. I met a very attractive woman in my early days and I went to a dance with another friend, a so-called friend. He was using me. And I showed them, I was not much of a dancer and I can't swim. And I showed him, "Here's a young lady I'd like to dance with." Tall, very attractive. He says, "Don't ask her. She'll say no." And I did ask her, she said yes. And that started the, it was more physical than anything else. We were married for three years. And then I went to the army. And then I came home on a furlough three days before I was supposed to. The captain of the company decided to be nice to me, and while I was packing up my stuff to go on furlough he says, "You know, Morris, I'll give you a weekend pass with it, so I'll give you more, I'll give you eighteen days." So I thanked him, and I didn't call my ex-wife to tell her that. The men kidded me. They says, "You'd better call your wife, because she may not be home." Because they tease a lot. I says, "I'm not like you guys. She'll be home." Sure enough, when I came home, she wasn't home that night. And things started, she swore up and down, "I went to movies with a girlfriend." Which I knew that's not true because she never had a girlfriend in her life. So anyway, I got my divorce through the army. Then I met Henrietta. Now that was different. We're married now, this November will be forty-four years that we're married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you have children?

SPIEGLER: One daughter.

LEVINE: And what's her name?

SPIEGLER: Her name is Janice. And a lovely person, very nice, and two lovely grandchildren. And my whole life had changed. As I get older, things are getting better and better for me.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Okay, well, unless you have something left that you'd like to note, we can conclude.

SPIEGLER: I have something, but don't quote it. I told you I was a street kid. In that railroad town, I must have been around twelve years old then, or twelve-and-a-half years old. There was one main street, and there was a bakery there, and there were all the, there were three girls there. One was a late teenager, and they had a stepfather, by the way. In those days, sex was very; it was a no-no under any conditions unless you were married. This, their older daughter asked me to go with her to deliver the bread that her father baked to the farmers. And she, there was a little path between the high corn where just enough of a path for one horse and a small wagon to go through, and she asked me if I wanted to go with her. I says, "All right, fine." I had nothing else to do after I brought the milk back from the farms. But one day there was another family with three young men, big guys. And the older one came over and talked to her and he decided to come along with us. So I sat in the back and he sat with her in the front seat driving the horse. And then they stopped the horse and wagon and tell me, "You know, how would you like to walk home? You're not too far from your house. How would you like to walk home? We want to go alone." I says, "Fine." What am I, going to argue with this guy, you know? So after they rode off a little further, I got into the bushes. It was high corn, and I

was short, so I was covered, and I wanted to see what they were going to do. So I didn't see actually anything, but I heard the corn rustle that they were lying down. That's the only thing. It was just my imagination. And I figured they didn't just lie down to have a picnic. I was not stupid in those days. I was about twelve years old, I think. So after, and I walked back. To make sure they don't see me, I walked back. It was only about a mile, not even a mile. Then when I needed money to buy candy for those Polish kids they should lay off me, and I had no money, I went and blackmailed her. I told her, "I know what you did. I saw what you did, and I'm going to tell your parents." And that's all she had to hear. So she paid me off. Until one day . . .

LEVINE: You mean, you did it more than once.

SPIEGLER: (he laughs) Yeah, more than once. About the third time she said, "I'm going to tell my boyfriend, and he's going to kill you." So I cut it out. (They laugh) I never told that story to anybody. I told you, I was a street kid. I was a survivor. And I don't think you'll print this. (He laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. On that note we'll close this interview with Morris Spiegler. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

END OF INTERVIEW