

EI-72

MORRIS LIBMAN

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RESIDENCES:

- **ENGLAND: LIVERPOOL**
- **US: NEWARK, NJ**

LEVINE: This Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I am here with Morris Libman in Tamarac, Florida. Morris came from England in 1923 through Ellis Island at the age of nine. This is August 25, 1991, in the afternoon. Okay, so let's start with where you came from.

LIBMAN: I came from, I was originally born in London but the family moved from London to Liverpool when I was three years of age and then we lived in Liverpool until 1923 and then we came to America. Thank God. (Morris and Janet laugh)

LEVINE: Okay, what is your exact birth date?

LIBMAN: May 27th, 1914.

LEVINE: When you were living in Liverpool, who were the family members?

LIBMAN: Well, I came from a family of eight children and things in Liverpool when I was eight or nine years of age, the conditions were worse than when the Depression was on in America, worse. Fortunately, my father had some relatives in St. Paul, Minnesota and my mother had some relatives in New Jersey and New York. And the only way that they could get from England to America, somebody had to send the money. In other words, we couldn't afford . . . , fortunately the people from St. Paul, Minnesota sent over my oldest bother, we have seven boys in our family and one girl, a family of ten. And he came over to America and he went to live in St. Paul, Minnesota. And he got there in the wintertime and he couldn't stand the winter because in England you don't get severe winters that you do in America, as in St. Paul Minnesota. So, he decided to move to New Jersey and fortunately he got a job. There was a big corporation years ago called the Durant Motorcar Company, and he was a very talented sort of a guy and became a foreman. He sent over money for another brother, got him a job in the Durant Motorcar Company. The two brothers sent over for another brother, got him a job at Durant Motorcar Company and about six or eight months later the three of them sent over for the seven of us. So we arrived in July of 1923.

LEVINE: So now what was your father's name?

LIBMAN: My father's name was Harris Libman.

LEVINE: Harris Libman. And your mother's name and maiden name?

LIBMAN: Well, her first name was Jane and her maiden name was Michaels.

LEVINE: And how about your brothers and in the order of the oldest down.

LIBMAN: What did you want to know?

LEVINE: What their names were.

LIBMAN: Oh, the oldest one was Lewis. The next one was Ben. My sister was Ada. My brother was Sam. My brother was Joe. My brother was Heimy, Heiman. I'm Morris Libman and the youngest was Reuben.

LEVINE: So, can you describe where you lived before you came here, before you came to the United States, like the house?...

LIBMAN: Well, I'll tell you what, we lived in Liverpool on a street, it was 48 Kensington, it was called, and the house was about eighteen or twenty foot wide with three floors. One floor we had a furniture store, my father had a furniture store on the first floor, and the third floor we had a shop to cut, to fix furniture, small shop, and in the middle floor ten of us lived. And then, of course, as I said before one brother came over, then the other brother, then the other brother, then the seven of us came over. But conditions were very, very bad over there. It was, it was really worse than the Depression here.

LEVINE: Is there anything about that town that you remember? Like, when you think about it, is there anything that, uh . . .

LIBMAN: Well, I'll tell you what. My wife and I made a trip over there about five or six years ago. I never wanted to go back to England because as a kid, I,

no appetite to go back. Anyway, we finally made a trip with her brother-in-law and sister-in-law of mine. We went to London and we decided to take a train to Liverpool. Now, I remember as a kid the Lime Street Station is in Liverpool and we took a taxi and I said, "Will you take me to 48 Kensington?" and on the way over, I spoke to my wife, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law and I told them I lived on 48 Kensington. I remember Guelf Street was the side street because when we were playing we couldn't play on Guelf Street because they had the trams or trolleys on Kensington, so we played on the side street. I told them I went to the Rathbone School and then sure enough they came up or the taxi drove to Kensington. I thought it was a big wide street. It s narrow. As a child, you know it would look. Then we took a picture of the house. The house is still there; it was sixty years old when we left there sixty-five years ago. And we drove around the corner to Guelf Street and I went over to the Rathbone School and I saw the school and I said, "That's not my school, I went to a big school;" and then I see a sign on the corner, the Rathbone, the school was still there. That's my few memories of Liverpool.

LEVINE: Now, when you came, you came with several of your brothers?

LIBMAN: Yes, seven of us came together. Three brothers came over first and my mother and father and four boys and the girl. That's eight, yeah and my sister and four of us, the youngest brothers.

LEVINE: Now, where did you leave from?

LIBMAN: From Liverpool, we went to South Hampton and then took the "Franconia" and came to America. It was third class those days. They never had, the people that came before that I read about they went steerage but we came third class.

LEVINE: Now, what was third class like? What were the accommodations?

LIBMAN: It wasn't too bad. It was nice. It was clean. You had your own, a few different rooms on the ship.

LEVINE: You had like a cabin?

LIBMAN: Yeah, a small ah, cabins like. I hardly remember it but the accommodations were nice, much nicer than the house that we lived in.

LEVINE: Oh, Okay, and do you remember anything about the voyage?

LIBMAN: I certainly do remember the voyage because we all got seasick. It was a very, except my younger brother, I was nine, he was seven and he was the only one who came down every morning ate his breakfast. And I still remember, they had a big long table with seven stools on each side, seven stools, you know, and there were seven of us. But every morning he came down, and he ate. But it was a very nice trip and we were excited about coming to America because we heard the Woolworth building those days this is the, you know, the big tall building. And we thought the streets were lined with gold, you know, and we read all the stories and it couldn't be worse than in Liverpool. Because when my brother sent over five pounds a week to our family, now, the pound in 1923 was five dollars, it's about a dollar eighty, what ever it is, and when we got that five pounds every week, we lived pretty good. Anyway, we had that, the whole thing with the three brothers was a little over a year or a year and a half tops. And the year and a half after the first brother when we all came over.

LEVINE: Now, when you were on the ship, you were sick the whole time?

LIBMAN: No, no, just a few, no just a few days.

LEVINE: How long was the trip?

LIBMAN: If I remember right, those days I think it was about a nine day trip, approximately nine days. I think they do it in five or six now but those days it was about nine or ten days tops.

LEVINE: And did you meet anybody on the boat?

LIBMAN: I can't remember who we met on the boat. That I can't, I don't remember. I guess we were so excited about coming to America that the most exciting part of the trip, when we got to the Statue of Liberty, everybody was on one side of the ship. I thought the ship was going to turn over. They wanted to see the Statue. That I remember. That's one of the, you know, I think we were all looking for the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: And what did people do when it came into sight?

LIBMAN: I don't know what they did, but they were all excited. They were waving, I still remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island?

LIBMAN: I remember, but the only reason I don't remember a lot about Ellis Island is that we went through pretty quickly because we were English speaking people, so it was easy for us. But I read some of the stories where there were days and weeks, but we went through the same day. We all had tags with our names, and I think there was a picture of the thing on you, because a lot of the people who came over couldn't speak English. It was hard to communicate, we did pretty good, but as we were English

speaking people.

LEVINE: Now, did you get a physical exam at Ellis Island or were you examined by the steamship company before you left England?

LIBMAN: You know, I can't remember that. I really can't.

LEVINE: Do you have any impressions from Ellis Island: Anything that...

LIBMAN: Well, I'll tell you, we were so elated to get to America that I guess we were all excited, when you're all excited, you can't remember all the things that were there. But we went through pretty good, we didn't have the problems that I read about. I learned more when I went to Ellis Island, we visited this year, when I filled out that application, the thing there. I learned more about Ellis Island than I knew when I was actually there. Maybe if I was a little older, it would have been...

LEVINE: Yes, now did your brothers meet you there?

LIBMAN: Oh sure, yep.

LEVINE: Do you remember meeting them there?

LIBMAN: Yes, I certainly do, yes.

LEVINE: It must have been a very joyous occasion.

LIBMAN: Sure, one we didn't see in about five months, the other maybe a year, and the other a year and a half. And we were so, grateful to be there.

LEVINE: And then where did you go from there?

LIBMAN: Well, they had an apartment set up for us in Linden, New Jersey, which is not far from Ellis Island. We took a train into Linden from, I think you take a ferry across, if I remember, and we took a train into Linden. Apartment was all set up for us in Linden. Had a six room flat for ten of us. (Morris laughs)

LEVINE: And do you remember that flat?

LIBMAN: I certainly do.

LEVINE: Could you describe it?

LIBMAN: Yes, it was on top of a tavern and it was on the corner of Edgar Road and Clinton Street, which today is Route One. And I remember that we, I remember it was a six room apartment on top. It was all set up for us, and about five or six months later my older brothers and sister got a job in Newark. And Newark and Linden, there were very few cars those days, so then we decided to move out of Linden. We moved into Newark.

LEVINE: Now, were you in school in Linden?

LIBMAN: I went to school in Linden maybe for one term, yes. And they made a mistake in school. My younger brother was taller than me so they, . . . In England, you don't go by grade, you go by standard one or standard two, that's what they call, instead of grade one and there's no grade A and B. So, they put him in grade three and they put me in grade two. So, I'm sitting there with the kids and I'm talking to them, and I find out that they are all younger than me, so I found out later they made a mistake and they had to switch us around. (Janet laughs) Anyway, only a short time in Linden.

LEVINE: And then you were in Newark?

LIBMAN: Yes, and then we moved to Newark, yes.

LEVINE: And is that where you more or less grew up, from that time on?

LIBMAN: Well, we started in Newark, now and we moved into Newark, now it was '23 when we came to America, so it must have been like '24, almost 1924, and we moved into Newark and I went to school in Newark and some of the brothers and the older sister went to work and the other kids when to school in Newark.

LEVINE: And how did you find, what was the adjustment like to living in...?

LIBMAN: We didn't know anything, nine years of age or ten year of age, it is so easy to adjust. It isn't, it was like we were on a vacation, like a holiday. So it, never had, never had a problem there.

LEVINE: And did the United States live up to your expectations when, that you had when you came?

LIBMAN: Yes, they did, absolutely yes, because anything was better than Liverpool. If we came maybe from a higher standard of living maybe it would have been a tough thing but we didn't ever, the Depression didn't ever bother us here. At least you could eat here.

LEVINE: And what about your mother and father? How did they find the adjustment?

LIBMAN: They found it very, they loved it. Absolutely loved it. Well, don't forget my

mother had her sisters and brother here. And my, well, of course, my father's relatives were again in St. Paul, Minnesota after awhile. But, they, they right into it. Wasn't a bit of a problem.

LEVINE: So, ah, let's see. Can you remember anything, were there other children who had come from other countries that you were associating with or did...?

LIBMAN: Well, I'll tell you what happens. In Newark was a melting pot for the whole world. If you were Jewish, the people who came over would go to the Jewish area. If you were Polish, they went to the Polish area. If you were Italian, they went to the Italian area. And we had lots of friends that came over from England at the time and they didn't have a place to stay. I could wake up one morning in our bedroom find somebody sleeping. There was an Englishman, they, we set up a lot of people in our house. That I remember.

LEVINE: So you remember other people coming through afterwards that you helped in the beginning?

LIBMAN: Yes, oh yes.

LEVINE: How nice. Are there any ways that you or your family members keep that you had from England that are ways that you just carried on, in this country?

LIBMAN: No, the only thing I notice, that my older sister has still got part of more of an English accent than the younger, the younger ones, because when you're young, you lose your accent. She has a much more decided English accent than all of us. She's the, she's the oldest of the time, now, because the other two brothers died.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of either from England or the voyage over that sticks in your mind, that's...

LIBMAN: No, I think that the fact that we were so excited about coming here that, that we were on cloud nine.

LEVINE: And how about then, you met your wife in Newark?

LIBMAN: Oh, I'll tell you what, now we go to Newark and we live in Newark and I met my wife in 1937 and we were married in 1940, and we have five children and fourteen grandchildren. (he laughs)

LEVINE: And what are your children's names?

LIBMAN: The oldest one is Harris, and in the Jewish religion you name your, you know, after the dead. That was my father's name, Harris. Our next daughter is Janice. She was named after I think my wife's grandmother, I think so. Then the next one was Jay. He was named after my mother, because my mother's name was Jane, so I think that has something to do with it. The next one, the next one is Howie. Howie's a doctor up in Boston. He was named after my wife's grandfather. The next one is Jeffrey. I can't think of who he was named after, but maybe I'll tell you later, I'll find out later and I'll let you know then. Other than that. (Morris laughs)

LEVINE: And you have fourteen grandchildren.

LIBMAN: Yes, we have fourteen grandchildren, yes.

LEVINE: Now, were you religious? Were you a religious family?

LIBMAN: My father was a very, very, religious man. He smoked cigarettes as a youngster and he couldn't afford the cigarettes, but Saturday he wouldn't smoke. And he tried to push it onto all the kids. We were medium, not as religious as him, you know, we went to Hebrew school and we went to, Saturday's we used to go to the temple and as children we were all bar mitzvahed and that's all about I can tell you.

LEVINE: And let's see, how about your father, he remained that way when he came to this country?

LIBMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Yes, trying to think of anything else. Is there anything, a carry over from England or maybe from your mother and father's Russian, with food or any traditional kinds of thing that the family . . . ?

LIBMAN: I believe they made themselves pretty . . . (pause) I think they handle it very well.

LEVINE: They wanted to be American . . .

LIBMAN: That's right, yes, that's right, yes. Accept the American ways.

LEVINE: Well, gee, sounds like a success story.

LIBMAN: It's a, somebody could write a book about it, they really could.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Is there anything else you could think of that has to do with coming here or being here?

LIBMAN: I think the nicest thing my parents ever did when they brought us to America. Otherwise, I would never have met my wife. (Morris laughs) I may have had a wife in St. Paul, Minnesota.

LEVINE: Okay. I can't think of anything . . . (tape pause) Perhaps you can tell me what your father did once he came to the United States?

LIBMAN: My father in England was a cabinet maker. A cabinet maker is a refined carpenter. He did the finer work. And when he came to America, he went down to Newark to look for a job. So, he went down to an outfit on Ferry Street in Newark call Garenstein. I don't know why I remember all this, this I can remember and they asked him if he wanted to apply for a job. He said, "Where you from?" He said, " I'm from the other side." They didn't say you're from England; they always used to say they're from the other side. "So how come you speak English so well?" Then he told him why he could speak English, because he lived in England. See, they thought he lived in Russia or Poland or something. He got a job there and he worked there for a year, then he went in business for himself. He went into the store fixture business. He manufactured counters and showcases and wallcases. And we had the shop on South Orange Avenue where we lived.

LEVINE: Oh, in other words, he had his own shop.

LIBMAN: Yes, after about a year of working, you know, to feel his way around. Then, of course, the Depression came along, and in the midst of the Depression, he died. He was fifty-five years of age. If they would have had bypasses those days, like they have now, he probably would have lived another fifteen or twenty years, but they didn't have it in 1935.

LEVINE: And then how about you, you went to school and how long did you...

LIBMAN: I went to school and I'm a high school drop out, and the reason I'm a high school drop out, the Depression was on and our family needed things and they weren't interested, with eight kids they were busy trying to make a living. And I dropped out of school and I got a job. I dropped out of school before my father died. My father died in '35, I dropped out in '31. Then I got a job, um, I worked with my father in the store fixture business, until he died. Then we gave up the business and we went out. That was in '35. Now what's your next question?

LEVINE: Then what did you do?

LIBMAN: What did I do? The Depression was on then and I saw an ad in the paper for a roofing and siding company wanted applicators, to apply shingles. I never applied shingles but I knew how to work a hammer and a saw and a nail and uh, I was handy. So I got a job for a roofing company in Newark, Colonial Roofing Company, on Broad Street in Newark. And they payed you so much a square. A square is one hundred shingles, they called it a square. And they payed you so much a square to apply the shingles. I did that for one year, but they, I used to have to go to South Jersey and stay over and I couldn't stand staying, I had to stay in cheap places and I couldn't take it. So I quit that and then I got a job in the Public Service Electric and Gas Company as a salesman. I did that for a year and then in 1938, I went into the gas station business with a brother of mine. And it wasn't enough for the two of us in there, so I got a station of my own. And from the gasoline station, in 1939, when the war broke out, I found a recapping plant in the Bronx, New York. A customer of mine had some money that he wanted to invest and I had a few dollars then to invest and we went into the recapping business. And during the war, at the particular time that we went into the recapping business in New York, I lived in Jersey and it was a long ride every day driving back and forth to the Bronx

so we moved the plant to New Jersey, to Roselle Park, New Jersey and from there I went into the new tire business, besides recapping. And in 19 . . . , let me see, my son came into the business, he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, my oldest son Harris, came into the business with me. Then we decided to move out of that place and go into a bigger place and do wholesale only. And we sold the business about three years ago. And we did very, very well with it.

LEVINE: So all of your family, were all of your family business in one way or another?

LIBMAN: Well, let me see, well, my oldest son came after he graduated from University of Pennsylvania, came in the business with me and then about six years later, Jay, the middle son, came in with me and the next to him, the, Howie, he became, he wanted to go to med school; he's a doctor up in Boston now. The youngest son was in part of the tire business, scrap tire business for awhile. Then he became a broker in New Jersey, Gibraltar Securities in New Jersey. And who am I missing now? Then my son-in-law, my ex-son-in-law, I set him up in the tire business and he did very, very well. And who did I miss out now, um, let's see . . .

LEVINE: Your son Jeff?

LIBMAN: Jeffrey's the youngest, he's the um, the stockbroker, the bond salesman. The next one is the doctor. The next one, oh, the middle guy, Jay, who was also in the business, he went ahead when he sold out and he bought a restaurant. And he sold the restaurant and he is stalling now to find out what he wants to do.

LEVINE: Okay, I think that covers just about everything, unless you can think of something else that you want to say.

LIBMAN: I can't think anything else I can tell you, you know all about the family. You know as much now . . . (laughs) Anyway that's about all I know unless you have any more questions.

LEVINE: Well now your mother and father, they had come from Russia before they came to . . .

LIBMAN: They came from Russia, they met in England, they met in London, England.

LEVINE: And how long were they in England before uh,...

LIBMAN: I can't answer that question. I can go backwards if you want. I was nine when we came to America so they must, it must have been there. We moved from London to Liverpool during the war because the Germans, that's what they tell me, were bombing London with zeppelins those days. They didn't have planes. They used zeppelins, like, you ever seen the Good Year Blimp? Similar to that, and they used to bomb it, and then we moved to Liverpool to get away from the bombings. Because with eight children that was a difficult thing.

LEVINE: Now when they came to England, did they speak English?

LIBMAN: Well, they must have been in England quite a long while. They spoke pretty good; I would say seventy percent, seventy-five percent.

LEVINE: I see, so they have no trouble when they came here.

LIBMAN: No, no, not at all.

LEVINE: Okay, thank you very much.

LIBMAN: You've got to say your . . . (laughs)

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.