

EI-84

IRVING REISBERG

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 1, 1901

RUNNING TIME: 17:45

DATE OF INTERVIEW: AUGUST 30, 1991

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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AUSTRIA, 1907

AGE 6

SHIP: THE ROTTERDAM

RESIDENCE: US: BROOKLYN, NY

PORT: ANTWERP

LEVINE: This Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today with Irving Reisberg who came through Ellis Island in 1907 at the age of six. He came from Austria. And we are here today, which is August 30th, 1991, in Tamarac, Florida at Mr. Reisberg's home. I'm very happy to be here and I'd like to start with asking you your birth date.

REISBERG: Birthday?

LEVINE: Yes.

REISBERG: January 1, first, 1901.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, and where were you born?

REISBERG: Well, I, in Austria.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the town?

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about, I know you were only six
when you left, but are there any remembrances
that you have of that town?

REISBERG: Well, yes, my father, you know, he used to take my
brother, you know, another son, you know, we used to go on a Saturday or
Sunday to the pool; they call it a michva, to go bathing. You know, that
sort of thing, you know, and we used to go. That's about all I can
remember, I mean.

LEVINE: Okay, well let me ask you some questions. What was your
father's name?

REISBERG: Abraham.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

REISBERG: Frieda.

LEVINE: And do you remember her maiden name?

REISBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that?

REISBERG: Vestrich.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

REISBERG: V-E-S-T-R-I-C-H, Vestrich.

LEVINE: And would you name your brothers and sisters, from the oldest on down.

REISBERG: Well, there was only four, we had six, my parents had six children. You know, about three of them are passed away.

LEVINE: Well, when you were living in Austria, who was living with you, brothers and sisters? What were their names?

REISBERG: Oh, Herman, Anna, Benny, and myself.

LEVINE: And were you closest to any particular member of your family, would you say?

REISBERG: My mother.

LEVINE: You were closest to your mother. Can you tell me anything? What was your mother like?

REISBERG: Beautiful, good.

LEVINE: What was she like? What was her personality?

REISBERG: Very good.

LEVINE: Can you remember any times, any-- When you think of your mother are there any experiences that you remember with her in particular?

REISBERG: (pause) Well, I know my mother's mother, you know, it was a grandmother. I remember her taking me on her hands, you know, holding me. That's about the only thing I can remember.

LEVINE: So, were your grandparents living right near you in Austria? Your grandmother and your grandfather, did they live near you?

REISBERG: That I can't answer you, that. I don't know where they lived. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: But I mean they were around, you saw them.

REISBERG: Well, yes, but they came here, my grandparents were here before us.

LEVINE: They came to the United States first?

REISBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Is there anything else you can think of about your family, the place where you lived in Austria?

REISBERG: Well, ah, (indicates no).

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now how was it decided that you would come to America? Do you know? Why did your family want to come?

REISBERG: Well, I'll tell you, my father didn't want to go in the army.

LEVINE: And your grandparents were already here?

REISBERG: I don't know if they were here or, you know, they must have been here when we left, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So where did you go when you left Austria? Do you remember the family packing up to leave, do you remember that?

REISBERG: A little. We went to Belgium, you know, to take the boat.

LEVINE: Right. Did you take anything with you? In other words, can you remember anything you or your mother--

REISBERG: I don't remember anything.

LEVINE: Did you have a lot of luggage? (pause) Can you remember that or did you come with very little?

REISBERG: Yeah, you know, the pillows, you know.

LEVINE: The pillows, uh huh.

REISBERG: You know, people take the pillows, the clothes, whatever they needed.

LEVINE: Uh huh. And would you say in Austria you had a good life? Was it a hard life? Do you remember?

REISBERG: No, a very good life.

LEVINE: A very good life. What did your father do in Austria?

REISBERG: I always said he was a politz. You know what a politz is in Austria? He used to take care of (pause) (he laughs) what they call a shtetl, he used to (he laughs). I'm going to tell you, it was like a politz used to own the land. He used to take care the help there. You know, he was a boss there.

LEVINE: He would like manage the land.

REISBERG: Manage the land, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was on the land?

REISBERG: That I couldn't--

LEVINE: Was it a farm?

REISBERG: Must have been a farm, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh huh, I see. And did your mother work when you were over there, do you remember?

REISBERG: That I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you left, do you remember going to Belgium on the trip from Austria?

REISBERG: Well, I know we went to get the boat there.

LEVINE: And was there a long wait or did you get right on the boat once you got there?

REISBERG: No, that I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay. The name of the ship?

REISBERG: Rotterdam.

LEVINE: The Rotterdam, and how long a voyage was it?

REISBERG: Six days.

LEVINE: Six days, oh, so it was rather fast. What do you

remember about being on that ship?

REISBERG: Well, I used to go by the water and look down the water
(he laughs) to see the boat going on the water, you
know.

LEVINE: Was it a pleasant trip?

REISBERG: For me it was a pleasant rip.

LEVINE: You didn't Get seasick.

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: No uh huh. Do you remember anything about, were you in
steerage? Were you in a cabin? How did you travel?

REISBERG: That I don't, I don't know. (He laughs.) I couldn't
tell you if it was--

LEVINE: When you were sleeping there, were there a lot of people
or was it just your family together in a place?

REISBERG: I don't know. I really don't know.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything your mother, when you travelled, who was with you in your family?

REISBERG: Well, I'll tell you, it was one, two, three, two brothers and a sister and myself, four people.

LEVINE: And your mother and father?

REISBERG: Mother and father.

LEVINE: And can you remember anything that your mother and father ever said about coming here or the trip?

REISBERG: No, if I did, I don't remember.

LEVINE: Can you remember coming into New York harbor? The Statue of Liberty?

REISBERG: Yeah, we, they put us, you know, we ran on the boat there to see the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: What were the people doing?

REISBERG: They were all jumping around. They were happy.

LEVINE: Did you know what that meant at the--

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: And do you remember seeing New York from the boat, from the ship?

REISBERG: Well, I don't know it was New York or whatever it was.

LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island, do you have any memories of that?

REISBERG: Ah, just a lot of people. That's all.

LEVINE: A big crowd.

REISBERG: A big crowd.

LEVINE: Did you gave the medical exam, do you remember that part?

REISBERG: I don't remember anything.

LEVINE: And when you got finished at Ellis Island and you went to New York, I guess, where did you go?

REISBERG: Brooklyn.

LEVINE: You went to Brooklyn.

REISBERG: Yeah, Belmont Avenue, Brooklyn. My grandmother was there.

LEVINE: I see. So your grandmother was there. Now did you then stay on Belmont Avenue?

REISBERG: Quite a while, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you start school there?

REISBERG: Well, after Belmont Avenue, we moved somewhere else. I went to school in Bushwick Avenue. You know where Bushwick Avenue is, huh? There was a school, Bushwick Avenue (pause)--I don't know the other street, maybe Dekalb Avenue or whatever it was. Yeah, I went to school there.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was like when you, did you speak any English when you came?

REISBERG: No. Not that I remember, (he laughs), no.

LEVINE: What was it like being in a country where you, you know,
you really couldn't speak the language? Do
you remember that?

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: Did you like school?

REISBERG: I did.

LEVINE: And did you stay in school or did you leave school and
get a job or what did you do?

REISBERG: No. We moved to Jersey City, you know, in New Jersey,
and I went to school over there. There's where I
graduated.

LEVINE: You graduated from eighth grade there?

REISBERG: Eighth grade.

LEVINE: Uh huh. So where you lived in Brooklyn and then in
Jersey City, were there a lot of people who had also immigrated?

REISBERG: That I can't answer you. It must have been.

LEVINE: And did your brothers and sisters learn English? And you learned English?

REISBERG: We all did in school, yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father, did they learn or no?

REISBERG: No, they could speak English after, you know, they learned.

LEVINE: But later.

REISBERG: Later, yeah.

LEVINE: A little slower.

REISBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the neighborhood in Brooklyn?

REISBERG: (long pause) I don't want to answer anything I don't, I don't remember, you know.

LEVINE: Even a little thing that you know--

REISBERG: Pushcarts, I remember pushing the wheelbarrow. I don't know. I don't even know (he laughs) it was a pushcart.

LEVINE: What did your father do then when he came here?

REISBERG: Looking for a job. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: What did he find? Do you remember what he was doing?

REISBERG: I don't remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember if you like it better over here than you did in Austria?

REISBERG: I wouldn't know.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else that you remember about Austria, about coming here, or when you settled in this country?

REISBERG: Well, (pause) are you talking about me or my parents?

LEVINE: Either one.

REISBERG: I know my father, you know, he didn't like it here. he wanted to go back because, you know, he was, what do you call it? Like a manager in a--

LEVINE: He had a good job over there.

REISBERG: Yeah, he had a good job, yeah.

LEVINE: And he wanted to go back. And did he ever go back?

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: No. And how about your older brothers and sisters, did they find work here? Did they like it here?

REISBERG: That I can't answer for you. But, no.

LEVINE: So then you married Helen. How did you meet Helen?

REISBERG: Helen, I was managing a restaurant, you know, and she come down to eat there, and I fell in love with her.

LEVINE: Did you court her?

REISBERG: Oh yeah, about a year.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first date?

REISBERG: Well I used to see her most every day. She used to come in and eat. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: She ate every day so you saw her. I see.

REISBERG: Most every day.

LEVINE: Do you have children?

REISBERG: Yeah, I have two children.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

REISBERG: One is Larry and one is (pause) (to his wife) one is Larry, what's the other one? (He laughs.) (His wife has been instructed not to speak during the interview and so she is not.)

LEVINE: (pause) Larry, and you have a daughter.

REISBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what's her name? (pause) (Mrs. Reisberg divulges information.) Marilyn.

REISBERG: Maril-- (He laughs.) Oh, yeah, I couldn't remember my daughter.

LEVINE: Okay. So do you have nay grandchildren?

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: No grandchildren; two children.

REISBERG: (Listening to his wife.) Two grandchildren? Yeah (laughs). Yeah, two.

LEVINE: All right. Is there anything else that you want to say about let's say attitudes that you have that maybe your mother and father had, that were instilled in you, that you still have? Anything your mother and father taught you about being a good person or about life, any lessons that you--

REISBERG: Well, my mother was a good, you know, very good. She was very good.

LEVINE: What do you remember as her having taught you?

REISBERG: Who?

LEVINE: Your mother, about life.

REISBERG: To be a good, to be good.

LEVINE: To be a good person. Okay. Well, thank you very much.

It's been a pleasure talking with you. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, having spoken with Irving Reisberg, in Florida.

(TAPE CONTINUES)

LEVIN: Janet Levine again. Mr. Reisberg has remembered a few more things about his childhood in Austria, so we'll put that on to the record as well. Why don't you tell me, as you just did, about on Sunday.

REISBERG: My father used to take us, my brother and myself, in a horse and buggy. You know, white horses in front, you know, go riding on Sunday, you know.

LEVINE: And he would take you--

REISBERG: To the michva. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: And so, in other words, your father, this was kind of above and beyond the average person being able to go in a horse and buggy with the white horses.

REISBERG: Yeah, the white horses, yeah. My father used to ride bareback, no saddle. He was pretty good. That I remember.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? What did she used to do?

REISBERG: Cook. (He laughs heartily.)

LEVINE: Was she a good cook?

REISBERG: Well, I don't know. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: It was good to you. Do you remember any particular things she cooked?

REISBERG: No, no.

LEVINE: And how about making the cushions?

REISBERG: Oh, the, she used to make pillows, the feathers and all that. Bed kavant, they used to call it.

LEVINE: Bed kavant. And that's comforter?

REISBERG: That's comforter, yeah.

LEVINE: And so she'd make a comforter and pillows--

REISBERG: Yeah, with the comforter, you know, it was cold there at night (he laughs), winter.

LEVINE: And how did she make them? Do you remember the things that she did?

REISBERG: No. I don't know who sewed them. I don't know, no. But I remember, you know, taking the feathers off the chickens, that they, what kind of chickens, young chickens, you know, the feathers are soft.

LEVINE: Oh, and she would take the feathers off?

REISBERG: I think she did.

LEVINE: I see, and then you don't know if she sold those?

REISBERG: Sold them, no.

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LEVINE: Did she sell the comforters?

REISBERG: No.

LEVINE: This was for your own private use?

REISBERG: Private use.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, great. Thanks.

REISBERG: Thanks.

THE END