

**EI-843**

**AUGUSTA JACOBS ZIMMERMAN**

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**POLAND, 1912**

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**SHIP: THE ZEELAND**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1997 with Augusta Zimmerman at her—in her home in Tamarack, Florida. Mrs. Zimmerman came from Poland, which was occupied by Russia, in 1912 when she was just about to turn four years of age. Today, at the time of the interview, Mrs. Zimmerman is eighty-eight years of age and we—we can begin now. If you would state your name and birth date, Mrs. Zimmerman.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, [clears throat] my name is Augusta Zimmerman and I was born in December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1912 in Poland, which was the—that area of Poland was quite close to the East Prussian border.

LEVINE: What—do you—do you remember the name of the town?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, Kraznipole. [PH]

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Kraznipole.

ZIMMERMAN: Kraznipole.

LEVINE: And it was 1908 when—when you were born.

ZIMMERMAN: It was, yes. We were quite close to the German border.

LEVINE: Had your family been there for quite a while—

ZIMMERMAN: As far as I know.

LEVINE: As far as you know.

ZIMMERMAN: As far as I know. Yes, my family had been there and we lived—Kraznipole is a little suburb of the capital of that Goberia [PH], you know, like that province. The province is Suvalk—Suvalki [PH]. The Poles called it Suvalki. Suvalk was the big city and Kraznipole was the little—the little town outside of—of Suvalk. It was—what I remember of it, the streets were dirt streets. We lived in a little—a little house that had an earthen floor, I remember the earthen floor. We had benches along the walls for sleeping. That was called a shlufbunk [PH], the sleeping bench, you know, benches on the wall. I had a cradle that my father had made for me. It was a handmade cradle with a—a solid—solid back, something like what you see the pilgrims, pictures of the pilgrim life here today. We had a—a big oven. I don't remember exactly how that oven was, but I know that you could go in back of the oven and climb up on top of it and sit there. It was a shelf in back of this. It was a brick oven, I suppose, and it was very warm up there and on Saturday we always went up on the oven because the—the—the—ah, the fire in the oven was going all night, so that it was quite warm on Saturday, too. I don't remember too much of—too much of—I remember that the—the men all wore the—those little hats with the visors, those black hats with the visors and high boots because the streets were dirt streets. I know that if we needed a doctor, we would—they would sneak over the border into—into Germany, Koenigsburg, Germany, which is today Cognin, which is Cognin—Cognin—Cognin Schat [PH] or Cognin by the Russians. When the Russians took it over, they changed the name from Koenigsburg to Cognin Schat or Cogninburg.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZIMMERMAN: But—

LEVINE: And you would get a doctor, and a doctor would then come back?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: Oh, you would go and see them.

ZIMMERMAN: We would go. We would have to—we would have to sneak over the border because Jews were not permitted to—to travel, to cross borders. We had no—no pass to cross the border and they would—my mother and I would hide in a wagon of hay covered up with the hay to get across the border. But it was close enough, probably a few hours ride in a peasant's cart to get into—to get into Germany for a—for a good doctor in a hospital. As a matter of fact, my mother and father were—I wasn't born until they had been married about two and a half years, and it seemed they couldn't understand why my mother was—was not having any babies. There was something wrong with my mother, and somehow she managed to get into Germany to—to see a doctor there, and she had apparently what they call a D&C today. And it must have worked because soon as she came back from there, she became pregnant with—with me.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: Now, my—do you want to hear any more of this?

LEVINE: Hmm. That's—that's very interesting.

ZIMMERMAN: This is background.

LEVINE: Yes.

ZIMMERMAN: Now, my—my mother—my mother's mother was—[tape off/on]

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming now.

ZIMMERMAN: Let's go back to Colognin, or you can change it on your—

LEVINE: No, why don't we—

ZIMMERMAN: Make a note of it. It's Cologningrad. [PH]

LEVINE: We've established now that it's Cologningrad.

ZIMMERMAN: Cologningrad, yes. It just came to me. I know it was Colognin something.

LEVINE: And you were saying about that little piece of land that all of the bordering countries would simply march in and take over at different times.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, they would just take over and then—and it was the—it was the—the first to be attacked in World War I. The Germans just simply marched right in. Do you want to go back a little for my—my history.

LEVINE: Yes.

ZIMMERMAN: My mother's—

LEVINE: Yes, I do.

ZIMMERMAN: My mother's background and my father. Is that interesting to you?

LEVINE: Yes, it is.

ZIMMERMAN: My mother's background.

LEVINE: Yes, it is.

ZIMMERMAN: And my father's background.

LEVINE: Yeah, that's fine. Okay.

ZIMMERMAN: Now, my—my mother—my mother's mother died giving birth to her.

LEVINE: Why don't you give your mother's name first, her maiden name?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, my mother's name was Ethel Yablonowski. Her maiden name was Yablonowski.

LEVINE: Can you spell Yablonowski?

ZIMMERMAN: Y-A-B-L-O-N-O-W-S-K-I, Yablonowski.

LEVINE: Okay.

ZIMMERMAN: My father's name actually was Judkowski, not Jacobs in—in—in—in Poland, but when he came here his brother was here and had already changed it to Jacobs because it was too hard to spell.

LEVINE: Okay, how would you spell the original?

ZIMMERMAN: Jud—Judkowski. You see, in—in the—the Polish, the Y and the J are—are—

LEVINE: Interchangeable.

ZIMMERMAN: Interchangeable.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZIMMERMAN: So that Yablonowski, you could—you could put that with a J actually.

LEVINE: J, yes.

ZIMMERMAN: And Judkowski with a J-U-D-K-O-W-S-K-I, Judkowski.

LEVINE: Okay.

ZIMMERMAN: And my father's brother had already changed it to Jacobs because the J, you know, as long as it started with J. So when my father came, you know, he just became Jacobs. But now my—my mother's mother died giving birth to her. Apparently there was no—no proper medical—medical help and then she was twenty-two years old. My mother was her third child, and the—my mother's father was probably not much more, maybe like twenty-two, twenty-four or twenty-five, if—if that much. Oh, well, I must digress to tell you about his parents.

LEVINE: Yes.

ZIMMERMAN: His mother, Toba Fagle, [PH] was married at the age of thirteen to—to Ellie Mahla [PH] and he was fifteen and all he did was go into schul every day, you know, to study. He was a—a [unclear] all the time, and she was thirteen. She was still playing with the children on the street, and they—my mother always used to tell how her mother used to call her when it was—when the sun was going down, she would say, "Toba Fagle, [speaks in Yiddish]."

LEVINE: Which means?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, you don't understand it? Oh. "Toba Fagle, come in. Come in from the"—you know, she was playing with the children in the street. "Come in and wash. Wash yourself up and—and change your clothes because your husband's coming home from schul already." She—she wasn't even mature enough really to—to be a wife, but they—you know, she was still—they were children.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: Just children. Anyway. When my mother died, she left me as an infant, just newborn. Since it was July and it was hot, they buried her immediately so that she shouldn't decompose too much. And so there's this—this young, you know, my young grandfather.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: Left with three young children, this—this newborn, a two-year-old and a five-year-old. They tell me that the women of the village put a pillow sort of accidentally on purpose over me, while they went off to bury her. Not over me, over my mother. I'm sorry.

LEVINE: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

ZIMMERMAN: They put a pillow over my mother, the newborn babe, because who was going to take care of this—this newborn infant? Somehow or other she survived. There must have been a lot of strength in my mother because she lived to be eighty-seven years old and she was strong. Strong. She had tremendous moral fiber. She was a strong woman. She kept us together. Anyway, he—the two-year-old—oh, the women of the village took turns nursing my mother. They hoped that she would die, but she didn't. The two year old didn't last very long without a—without a mother's care to keep them together. The five year old survived. My mother somehow or other survived and this—this, her young father, of course, shortly married another woman. She was a girl. She had not been married before and she proceeded to have a whole brood, a whole family of children. And he was very enterprising and built up a successful—successful businesses. He became quite a landowner. He owned farms and orchards and—and a kretchma [PH] which was like a tavern, an inn. They sold—he bought and sold all kinds of things, and my mother and—and the five-year-old brother, you know, were the stepchildren and this was a stepmother right straight out of Cinderella. Absolutely straight out of Cinderella. The other children had all kinds of privileges. They lived like, you know, well-to-do. They went to [unclear]. They had plenty to eat. They had clothing. My mother had nothing. My mother was the—the servant girl. She had to carry water every morning on a—on a yoke with—with two pails hanging because they had no running water. She didn't have proper shoes. She would wrap sacks around her feet for—you know, to protect her against the snow. She had—they didn't send her to learn anything. She didn't even have proper food, except that one of the—one of the girls of the, you know, her half sisters

was very kind to her and would bring her back things from the table, you know, that—that—that she would hide in her pocket. They—they taught my mother on the sly when my mother had time. They taught her how to read, Yiddish, of course and the prayers and everything. This one was very kind to her. Of course, they're all—they're all gone. They're all—my mother had absolutely none of the advantages that a wealthy father could have given her because she was the—she was Cinderella, that's all. And—and—and her brother, too, similarly. Now, my father had been taken into the—to the Russian Army when he was still quite, quite young. And the Russo-Japanese War broke out so that when his term of service was over, he still had to—he—he still had to, you know, he was stationed in Archangel which is the land of the midnight sun way, way, way up in the northern, northern part of—of Russia. And when he—when the Japanese—Russo-Japanese War was finally over, he came home. But he had no trade; he had nothing. He too used to sit in the—like a Yeshiveh bocher, sit and—sit and learn in the shul. My mother saw no future for us—her. Her father—her father gave her nothing. My—my father tried to learn a trade. Somebody taught him how to mend shoes so he was a shoemaker for awhile. And my mother felt there was just nothing there for us and she urged him to go to—come to America. We had this—

LEVINE: Did she ever tell you the story of how—how they met and your—

ZIMMERMAN: They didn't meet. It was an arranged shiddach [PH].

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: It was—it was arranged. It was arranged and the dowry, you know. He came from a poor family and, as a matter of fact, they needed the dowry that she brought to give to his sister so that she could get married. So in other words, the little that my—that my mother's father gave to her as a dowry—he was oblivious. He was just busy with his business and was completely oblivious that there were these two children being treated so, so badly with not—not proper clothing, not proper food—not—not—no education. No nothing. And of course the stepmother would always tell stories about how they misbehaved, you know, and always painted them in very bad colors. So my mother urged my father to go. He was reluctant because there were his roots; there was his family. He was reluctant but my mother was very insistent and he finally left when I was seven months old. He came to America. Now, he had a brother here already who was established. And usually, in most of these cases they found work right away. You know, they were diligent and enterprising. They found work and managed to send

for their families very soon. But my father didn't want to work on Saturdays. And in those days, in the sweatshop days—he got himself a factory job. And in the sweatshop days there they worked six days a week from sunup till—till after sundown. Piecework too. You know, piecework. And he refused to work on Saturdays so he couldn't even get work to do. He knocked around and knocked around and finally, finally had to—had to agree to work on Saturday because three and a half years went by before he was able to send for us. Three—over three years.

LEVINE: Now, was he in New York City at this time when he came first?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, in Manhattan, before he was finally—he finally had to go to work on Saturdays and he finally got a job and managed to furnish a little three-room apartment. And he sent for us, for my mother and for me.

LEVINE: Was that something that really bothered him, that—

ZIMMERMAN: Well—

LEVINE: —he had to make that concession? I mean—

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes. It did bother him because this is—now, this is very strange. All through his—the rest of his life, there were—he had a recurring dream. It would come once a month, once in several months, a recurring dream. A red—a burly, red—red-bearded man wanted to strangle him because he—because he broke the Sabbath. And long after the unions came in—the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Unions came in and established, you know, the Saturday as a day off, and he no longer had to work on Saturday—he could just go to shul and come home and have his challent [PH] and, you know, that he still had that dream. Every once in a while that dream would come—would come back. And he would scream in his dream and we knew it was the red—the red-bearded man who was coming to strangle him because he didn't observe the Sabbath.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: So apparently—you know—so my father sent for us and we came. Now, he—he saved and saved and sent us first-class tickets on—on the boat. But my mother said, no, she was not going to—oh, we—she sold this little—this little house that had a thatched roof and, as I say, an earthen floor. And it was just one room. I mean,

that's all I—and the benches—the sleeping was benches. And we had a table and that was—that was the little—the little cabin.

LEVINE: Were you the only child?

ZIMMERMAN: At that—yes, because he left when I was six—seven—seven months old. As a matter of fact, he left her pregnant and she didn't know yet.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: She was just pregnant and didn't know when he left.

LEVINE: And then—

ZIMMERMAN: So not aware yet. And so there was another—a baby born while he was—he was in America. But, well, I—I suppose I've lived with a—with a sort of a guilt all my life about him that—that I had pneumonia and my mother took me probably to Germany again to a doctor and left this baby in somebody's care. And it was the summertime and there was this sickness that they called "summer complaint." It was probably a form of diarrhea or, you know, one of these viruses—stomach viruses that—that came in the summer because there was no refrigeration. It probably came from—came from milk that was sour or germs or—you know, we know much more about it today. You know, looking back, that's probably what the child had. And when my mother came back with me from—from the doctor, he was very, very sick, probably dehydrated and he died. So there's this—this boy, the one boy. Now, subsequently, my mother had five more—five more girls.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: We were six girls, no boys. And this one boy that my father never got to see is the one who—who died in infancy like that, you know. And I—I—I—I grew up sort of blaming myself in a way, you know, that she—she went away with me to care for me and lost—and lost this other—this other child. And, of course, it was a devastating—it was a devastating thing. So where was I? So, of course, we were—we were very poor. We just lived on what—what my father could—could send us, which was—which was very, very little. My mother had some chickens. We had a cow. We didn't starve but I—I gather. Anyway, my father managed to send us a first-class ticket. But my mother said no. She would—she cashed in the first-class ticket for third-class steerage and with the money that—the difference in money that she got back. And incidentally, the—what

they call the shiffscarte [PH]—you know, the ticket was paid out. There was a—there was a man on—on our street. You know, when we came to America there was—I wish I could remember his name. But he had a—like a travel agency, probably. And he would book all these—these—these—these passages. When people wanted to send a shiffscarte for—for a relative they would go to him and they would pay it out, like, 25 cents a week or something, pay out a ticket to bring somebody. And all they needed was one person from a family to come. And that was the way it was done. That one, you know, with these little quarters or pennies or nickels or whatever at this—this little agency—he had, like, a steamship agency. I guess he must have had. They would send—they would send these—these—they would pay these little amounts till they could get together a ticket for the second one. Then there were two. And that way they would get a third and a fourth and eventually everybody would come. You know, all the—they would manage to get—of course, it was very sad for the parents. The—the older ones—you know, the—they would send for the younger ones who were still able-bodied and—and—and could work their way and contribute towards—towards bringing over another sibling. Very seldom did the—did the parents get to come. And so when—when you said good—when they said good-bye to their children they knew they would never, never, never again see them in all their lives.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving? Were there—were there some sad good-byes for your mother?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes, yes. There were some sad good-byes. Yes, some friends, you know. Sad good-byes. And my mother sold the cow and the few chickens and she sold this little shtibela [PH] and—and with the little money, the extra money that—that she got from exchanging the ticket, we managed—we had to go out. We had to escape also in—in a bottom of a hay wagon—you know, hidden by—by hay to cross over the border into Germany. And then I don't remember much about that—that trip. We had to get to Antwerp because that's where we sailed from. I know we—I remember we were on a train at one point. How my mother negotiated all this, how she knew her way around, I don't know.

LEVINE: And she spoke only Yiddish? She—did she speak anything else?

ZIMMERMAN: Polish, probably.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: Or maybe Russian. I don't know. Russian was the language of Polish. I'm not—I don't know. She spoke those because she and my father used to—when they don't want us to know, you know, they would converse like that in a language that we didn't know. We—

LEVINE: Are there any memories of—of Poland where you were living that you have? I know you were only three-plus years.

ZIMMERMAN: Just—just the little shtibela, the little hut we lived in and the cradle on the floor where I slept. And I had a cat and this—this stove. I don't know how these—these—these stup—it must have been like these bakery ovens or something that were built into the wall, because behind the stove was this high wall and it had like a—like a—

LEVINE: Shelf.

ZIMMERMAN: —like a shelf on top where we used to climb up on Saturdays, particularly, because you let the—you let the fire go all night. You know, you didn't put it out. You know, we were religious. We didn't put it out. And all I remember was—was how the men looked and the women with the—with the shadles [PH]. They all wore shadles. My mother—as soon as they got married. My mother refused to have her hair cut and wear a shadle when she was first married. And he was ex—she was ostracized. She had very beautiful hair and she didn't want to have it cut off. And she was os—but she was ostracized. They didn't let her into shul, for one thing. And when she would be walking they would walk away. They would step off the sidewalk and walk around her.

LEVINE: And yet she observed the religious Sabbath.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes. But she did, but this was a very important thing. You're supposed to have your hair cut off and wear a shadle. You know, one of these—one of these wigs. I have a photograph if you want to see it.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. [unclear].

ZIMMERMAN: My mother with a shadle. Eventually, she had to give in. She had—she had to give in. She had all her hair cut off but then it did—it grew back. She didn't keep cutting it after that. But she did wear this—this—this awful monstrosity of a shadle. Yes, yes. But she was a—my mother had a certain strength. She was very observant all through her life. You know, she never lit a match on

Saturday. You know, everything was strictly, strictly kosher. But some things, you know, she—when they made sense, you know, she would—she would get around them. What was I telling you?

LEVINE: You were telling about—

ZIMMERMAN: Yeah, how we got—we got to Antwerp.

LEVINE: Antwerp, yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: And the ship. Now, we were in steerage and I—I don't remember too much about the ship, except that the—the bunks—there were bunks, three tiers of bunks. That I remember. And it was—it was—they—they—everybody knew when they were going on this long voyage. I think it took about 10 days at that time to cross the Atlantic in October; probably we had some storms too. And everybody would prepare cherries with—with alcohol or whiskey or something poured over them to—and that was supposed to relieve—they used to say they “hat gestelt karshen [PH].” Karshen are cherries, not gestelt. They—they put them together, you know. And that was supposed to relieve the nausea, these—

LEVINE: So people would bring this with them on board the ship?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yes, with their luggage and, you know, whatever food, because the food—they wouldn't eat the food if it's not kosher. So, you know, they tried—tried to get around it and—and bring as much food as they could and eat whatever they—they knew would—would not—would probably not be traif. But this—this cherries—they would put it at the bottom of a jar, a large jar or a bottle and pour alcohol or whiskey over that and let it, I don't know, for weeks and weeks. And that was supposed to settle your stomach. Well, maybe—maybe a shot of liquor does settle your stomach if you have, you know—and so, of course, this was—this was a horror, as I think back on it, these three tiers of bunks. And I remember that lots and lots of people were lying in the bunks all day because they—they were seasick. And I was not; I was not seasick. And they—so they used to send me—whoever. Strange people, you know. My Jewish name is Sara Gittle [PH]. They used to call me Gitela [PH]. “Gitela, go do this.” And “Gitela, call so and so.” And “Gitela, bring mir”—and “Gitela” this and that because I was—I guess I was bright enough, you know, to—so they—they made use of me on the ship. I remember that.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about the ship?

ZIMMERMAN: Just this, that it was very big and there was this ocean all around, and the three tiers of people and everybody very unhappy in all these—in all these bunks. It was a—it was a misery down in steerage. What else? Just a misery.

LEVINE: And it was the Zeeland, the name.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. Yes, yes. I think they pronounced it Zayland because it's probably German—it's a German derivation. And finally came the day—there was the Statue of Liberty and, of course, everybody rushed to all the portholes to—to see the—to see the Statue of Liberty. And we were cleared, you know, to—to go. And, oh—and one of the things that my mother used the money for—you know, this extra little money that she had, was—was she knew we were coming. It was going to be winter and she wanted me to have a proper coat for America. You know, a nice, warm coat, that I should come with a nice, warm coat. Now, we didn't have stores. In fact, in those days, even—even in the United States there was a lot of—there was not much ready-to-wear clothing. Clothing was—was made. She had the best dressmaker in our town make me a coat, a warm coat. And it was—all I remember about it was that it was brown and it was ready shortly before we took off. And I cherished that coat. I wouldn't let a speck of dust fall on that coat; this was my prized coat to wear in America. And my father met us as soon as we were cleared. And we got on this—this ferry. And first of all, he didn't—he didn't recognize me. He hadn't seen me since I was six or seven months old. And I had had a red birthmark on the side of my nose, which disappeared. Incidentally, you know, this was something—something interesting. I had this—this—this, like a cherry birthmark. It was not flat. It was—it was a raised little birthmark right on the side of my nostril here. And it was getting a little bit bigger, you know, and—when I was a few months old. And they didn't know what to do with it. At that point, I guess my mother was in no condition to go into Germany to see a doctor. And the doctor—the doctor in Suvalk, you know, the—the town—the bigger city that we were close to, which was small enough in its way, but that was the big city—said it would have to be removed surgically. And she couldn't, what, cut her darling baby. You know, cut the baby. No, she wouldn't. Then the old wives had all kinds of stories and they told he to do all kinds of things, like to sleep in the house of a goy for seven nights with me. So she had to do that. She did it; she did everything because how will I grow up with a—with a—like a cherry—like a strawberry growing out on my nose? That didn't work. They told her to—to look—look over the—look—look at the moon—at the new moon over her right shoulder, sit with—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: You were saying of all the old wives tales—

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, the old wives things.

LEVINE: —that your mother [unclear].

ZIMMERMAN: The last—the last thing that—that she was told to do was to take the placenta of a newborn seventh son where somebody was having a seventh baby boy. She was to take the placenta as soon as the baby was born and wipe it over my nose. And that was the last thing she tried and the birthmark disappeared. But now, of course it's—we know it's not that. I have read since that there are many marks that—that babies are born with that automatically disappear within the first year, that they just naturally do disappear. Well, then, this must have been one of those. But—but those are the things that—that she did, you know, to—to—

LEVINE: That's fascinating.

ZIMMERMAN: These old wives tales. Of course, the midwives. You know, these midwives.

LEVINE: Right. When—now that we're on this topic, did you ever hear or did your mother ever tell you of any other kinds of wives tales or folk medicine or any of those kinds of things that people—

ZIMMERMAN: Not particularly. My mother was too smart for—for most of these—these really foolish things. But this, she was so desperate she would do anything. Now, to get back to—to get back to when my father met, he said, where is the strawberry mark on my nose? And I was born with black, black hair, lots of black hair. But by the time I came here when I was almost four my hair had lightened considerably. It was a light brown. And he said at first, "This is not—this is not Gitela." See, "This is not—where is Gitela?" And he—this here—but he said, "No, this is not Gitela. What are you—what—what have you done? What have you done?" And—because the strawberry mark wasn't there and my hair, you know, was—was dif—anyway, he—I don't think he was really suspicious. But, you know, on first alarm, and then he—he took me by the hand—oh, and—and all the time that I was in—in—in Poland I used to see all the children had fathers. And I would say, "Where is my father? I have no father." My mother took a photograph and she

said, "This is your father." And she propped it up, you know, this photograph of him and, you know, "This is—this is your father." And I cried and I said, "I don't want a paper father. I want a real father." See, you don't—you don't speak Yiddish. A papierinim [PH]—a papierinim taten [PH], a [unclear] papierinim taten, a paper father. "Where's my real father? My real father?" So when we—when we finally came to Ellis Island there is—she said, "This is your real father." See, "This is your real father." And, of course, you know, he embraced us. He was very happy to see us. He'd been waiting for us three and a half years for us to come. And he—there's this coat in my arms. So he lifted me up in his arms. "And what is—what is this?" And my mother said, "This is—this is the coat I had made, you know, especially to wear in America. It's the latest—the dressmaker in Kressna [PH], Poland insisted this was the latest fashion." Well, he took one look at this coat. Now, I—I don't know. It was a brown coat; that's all I remember. He took one look at this coat and apparently—I—I don't think my father was the height of fashion but there must have been something really outlandish, out-modish about—about—about the look of this coat, that he was aware that it would never do. And he just flung it over the side of the—of the ferry into the—into the water. Oh, he said, "Oh, this is"—you know, "This—this won't do." And he just flung it out. Well, I cried my heart out. I cried my eyes out. This was—this coat was my special—I was going to wear this in America. I was going to wear this coat and that was—I was going to be the most beautiful child in all of America, the dressmaker said to me. So I hated him from that moment on. This—this man I didn't even know, you know, and he threw my best coat away and I cried and cried and then carried on. He took us—we arrived at the home of his—his brother, who had been here already. His brother was, what they called in those days, a custom tailor. When I said there weren't many ready-to-wear shops in those days, there weren't. When a man needed a suit he would come into this tailor, like my uncle, my father's brother. And they had samples of fabrics of—samples of fabrics and they were pasted on white cardboards a little bigger than this, each with a swatch of fabric. And I remember the name of the company; it was Detmar Willands [PH]. Every—was marked Detmar Willands. And my—my uncle, the tailor, would take a measure—a tape measure around his neck. It was a cleaning store. He did cleaning and pressing and custom tailoring. He would make—you had to have a suit made; you'd pick your fabric and he made the suit. And they would come for—for fittings and—and at the end they would have the suit, probably paid it out little by little too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: It was a good—it was a good tailor. Yeah, handy—you know, good tailor. So we came to—we came to the house there. Now, in those days there were—where we lived—we lived in upper Manhattan on 100<sup>th</sup> Street.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: East—are you familiar with—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: Sure you are, East 100<sup>th</sup> Street. We drove by. Maybe some 20 years ago we drove by. We had to be in Mount Sinai Hospital when my husband was—was there. And we drove by to see if that street still existed. And it didn't. It had been—the whole thing had been torn down. That whole area had been torn down and replaced with projects. You know, these—these—with the—

LEVINE: Can you describe what it looked like?

ZIMMERMAN: The street? 100<sup>th</sup> Street was—it was a narrow street, not a wide avenue. It was a street street. And this was between First and Second Avenue on 100<sup>th</sup>—East 100<sup>th</sup> Street. Now, the entire street from First Avenue to Second Avenue on both sides of the street was filled with five-story brick houses, that tan brick, as I remember. Or maybe it was red brick and—covered over with smoke and—and dirt. The houses—there were no spaces between the houses. It was like one continuous building from First Avenue to Second Avenue on both sides of the street. You never saw the sun. It was like these canyons, if you would. Down on the sidewalk there were these—like, these—these high, five-story canyons on both sides of the street. Wall to wall—there were no spaces between the houses at all. They were all attached and all the same, five-story houses on both sides of the street. Walkups. Of course, walkups.

LEVINE: Did they have stoops?

ZIMMERMAN: Usually, there was a store at the bottom. The bottoms were all stores and my uncle had his store in a—across the street from where my father had gotten this apartment for us. And of course they were—did you ever hear of the quarter meters? The quarter gas meters.

LEVINE: In the apartment?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. We didn't have gas that you paid for, you know, by the month at the end of the month. You had to have a quarter. And there was a meter up near the ceiling in the kitchen, I guess it was, a meter about the size of a big box of cereal that—that was attached there. And it was gas—gaslight. And the light in the—you cooked by that gas, of course. And there was a—the light hanging from the ceiling with what they called a mantle. It had a mantle in it that looked like it was the size of maybe half a banana. And it—but it was made of, like, very heavily starched cotton.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: And it could easily—it was—it was—it was a—it could easily fall apart. You handled these mantles very carefully. You bought this mantle and you inserted it and then you—you—you—you lit a match to it every time. Now, you had to have a quarter there all the time, because you never knew when—when your quarters—the last quarter—you couldn't put two quarters in. It would take one quarter. And you never quite knew when the last—when the quarter would—would—would be used up. So you had to have a quarter extra. And most people would keep another quarter right up on top of this—on top of this meter that was near the ceiling, so that suddenly you sat in the dark. The lights—the lights were out and you sat in the dark. So you'd quickly—by candlelight, you'd—you'd go and you'd find this other quarter and throw it into the slot. And you'd have gas again, a quarter's worth of gas. Now, we were very, very poor. We didn't have—we didn't have quarters very often. I remember doing my homework as a little girl by candlelight because candles were cheaper than the gas. And I remember the tallow. The candle—the candle would be standing right near my book, because the houses—there was almost no light coming in through the windows, because the yard—I mean, across the street—there was no light getting in anywhere. These tall, tall houses, unless you lived on the top floor, you never saw the sun.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you—

ZIMMERMAN: It was so narrow.

LEVINE: Did each apartment have either a window in the front by the street or in the back?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes. We had—we had windows. There were lots of apartments on the East Side, you know, down in Lower Manhattan that didn't even have windows and that didn't have their own bathrooms.

LEVINE: [unclear]

ZIMMERMAN: I don't know if you—we had—we had a, well, bathroom. It was about the size of a telephone booth and all it had was a toilet. That's all.

LEVINE: In the apartment?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes. We were—we were—my father was very proud of the fact that he—that he took us to an apartment that had their own toilet because—because there were many houses—many homes there that had toilets in the hall. You know, like, a row of three or four toilets and everybody would use them. Or some houses, which were a little more upscale than that, had one toilet for two apartments. And you could enter it, you know, from—from—from either side. And this Friday was this lady's turn to wash the toilet and next Friday was the next lady's turn to wash this toilet to keep it—you know, keep it clean. But we had our own toilet but no bathtub. There was a washtub in the kitchen made of cement, I guess—a tub. A tub. You—you had to—a child could fit in it nicely but for an adult it was—it was really—it was really close.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: Very close. But—but that—

LEVINE: But you took—you—

ZIMMERMAN: But that's all. That's all we had, you know, this bathtub. Some kitchens had a double with a partition in the middle. You know, a double because you washed your clothes—in those days, you washed your clothes by hand. And so this—this washtub came in handy. You had your soapy—soapy water in one and the rinse water in the other. Years later, some enterprising people became very smart and took out the partition so that you had—you know, maybe it was, you know, then maybe four feet long, five feet long and a person could really sit in it. But—but originally, there was just one of these tubs, or even if it was two it had the partition so that it was perhaps three feet square, maybe less than three feet square.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, was there such a thing—I'm trying to think of the right word for it, but it was an air space that existed between each—the buildings.

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, that was like a yard. It was a small yard.

LEVINE: But I mean between—where they were in a row from one building to the next.

ZIMMERMAN: No.

LEVINE: There was nothing—

ZIMMERMAN: No. These things just touched.

LEVINE: —where you hung clothes or—

ZIMMERMAN: It was a solid wall. In the back there was a yard, you know, because the people who's windows faced the rear of the—the rear of the house had—had this little yard, you know. A little—but even there, if you were on a lower floor the sun never got to you. You never saw the sun. It was like being at the bottom of a—bottom of a canyon—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: —because it was all so cramped in and so—so close together.

LEVINE: Were you on a—a lower floor? Was your family living on a lower floor?

ZIMMERMAN: We were—at that point we were, I think, on the third floor out of five. Later on, we had to move to the fifth floor, you know, because naturally it was cheaper up on top.

LEVINE: Oh, it was cheaper for---

ZIMMERMAN: And we were—we were always in trouble because my father—the only job he could finally get when he—when he agreed to work on Saturday was—he had no skills. He wasn't—he—he got a job as a buttonhole maker in a shirt factory—men's shirt factory. And this was machine buttonholes. It was not a highly skilled job. Mostly, they had girls doing that. Most of the men went in for, you know, the more intricate tailoring that involved, you know, making collars or putting on pockets or something that required more skills. My father was a very hard worker. They worked piecework in those days—very hard worker. But somehow, when I look back on it, he was not—not enterprising, not—he had no initiative to go up or to better himself. And in those days, the—as I say, it was the sweatshop days before the—the labor movement. And then shortly afterwards, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, which became a very, very powerful union, was just starting at that time, just

beginnings. And they would have these rallies, you know, these speakers that said, "Look how hard you work and it's piecework. And if you don't, the boss stands over you practically with a whip. And—and—and you work six days. You never see your mother. You never see your children. You never see your wife. When they come home, they're—everybody's asleep." You know, they're—some of these Yiddish poems talk about that too, how they never see their child, you know. "So let's unite. Let's unite and go out on a strike." Well, what's a strike? They had to be taught what that was because that was the beginning. Those were the beginning days of the strikes. So eventually they got them out on strike. So, of course, when there was a strike there was—there was no money. Strike meant you walked a picket line outside and sometimes they would win the strike and the boss would take them back. And sometimes the boss didn't want to take you back. He just moved his factory to North Carolina or—or—and the work was seasonal. And—and then, of course, when—when was a good time for the—for the union to call them out on strike? That would be when the—when there's—when there's work to be done, when the boss has a contract with work that has to be done. When the factory's standing idle with no orders, it doesn't matter. He doesn't care if you take him out on strike. So my father was always on strike. As soon as the season would start and they would, you know, work a couple of weeks, along would come the union organizers and pull them out on strike, so there was no money, always the strike. Sometimes it was the poor season anyway. The boss didn't have any contracts. And the boss worked on a shoestring himself. You know, he was—they were no capitalists. These were contractors, not manufacturers—contractors. So it was either—either it was times were bad and the season was slow, or if—if things were going along well, the union would come out and pull them out on a—on a strike. Or, very often, if the boss—if things were not going well in the factory, the boss would set fire to it or have—have a—one of these convenient fires so the place would burn down altogether. So we—we—[laughs]—we were always poor as could be, poor as could be. There was a—a man that they used to call "Crazy Sam" who used to come by with a push cart of odds and ends of shoes, single one—one of—one shoe—shoes. How he got them, he must have had some source. They were new but they were not pairs and they were all kinds, men's, women's, high-top, low-top, single shoes. If—and you stood there. My mother would stand there very patiently and try to pair together two, find two that almost matched, at least—that almost matched. Sometimes—I remember wearing a pair of shoes where—you know, they had these high, button—button-top shoes or high, laced shoes. I remember wearing a pair of shoes where—where one was

a size two and one was a size six. But that's all right. That was a—they covered my feet. I remember having shoes where the toe of one had this—this stitching, you know, like the—the eyelets and stitching in the toe, fancy stitching. And the other toe did not. But it was a pair of shoes.

LEVINE: Was your mother enterprising in—

ZIMMERMAN: My mother was the one who kept us alive. My mother was the one who kept us together, because my father—they went out on strike, he would sit and read his paper until some—maybe some co-worker found a job someplace else and he would come and he would say, "You know, Hiam [PH], they need a buttonhole maker someplace." He was a bright man, very intelligent, very well read. My father could debate politics, current events but somehow or other, he lacked the initiative to go. I mean, you have a family of, you know, five, six children home. And when this place closes down or burns down or moves away to North Carolina, find something else. He would sit and read his newspaper from cover to cover. He was up on all the latest news and then he could debate anybody on any subject—till somebody would come and they'd say—you know, he'd find a job. He was maybe a collar maker and he would say, "Hiam, they need a buttonhole maker where I'm working now. I've found this new job." Fine. Hiam would go and he'd work—work his head off—work his head off. There was no stopping him. But this is—this was it. We were always—the wolf was always at our door, always and always at our door.

LEVINE: In what other ways was your mother enterprising?

ZIMMERMAN: Enterprising? My mother had an arrangement with the bakery. They didn't have the packaged bread in those days, you know, the—they—they sold the loaves as they baked them. Whatever was left at the end of the day or by tomorrow—tomorrow, she would go in tomorrow, and he had set aside for her a basket full of two-day-old bread or two-day-old whatever. And my mother made the most wonderful [unclear] out of those two—two-day-old bread. She would soak it. She would soak it. The bread was so hard you—you know, she would—she would soak it in water, mix with—with a couple of eggs, a little cinnamon, a little sugar, mash it up and she might—she would make us the most delicious pancakes [unclear]. The—the man in the fruit store knew her. He would set aside the fruit that was always damaged. You know, bananas that were on their last legs, apples where half the apple was rotted off already. Don't forget; they didn't have refrigeration either, you know, in those

days. In the summertime, fruit would spoil fast. Potatoes that were, you know, gone with spots. My mother was very good at cutting away all the spots, cutting away the part—the parts of the apple that were rotted, the parts of the orange, the parts of the peaches. She would make a compote out of the fruit that was absolutely delicious. She would put it into a pie. And it smelled—my mother—I don't know. To this day, we girls say—you know, I have—we're all sisters—whatever Mother put her thumb into tasted delicious. She could make anything taste delicious. It had special flavor. Even the pancake—the potato pancakes that my mother made out of half-rotted potatoes were delicious. The smell would fill the house. She would—she would bake them into—into pies, make them into—into compotes, applesauce, whatever kind of—you know, whatever, with day-old, with three-day-old bread, with whatever. And she kept body and soul together. At one point, we lived in—we lived in Brooklyn. I—I must have been maybe seven, eight years old. And a mile—about a mile away in Greenpoint [PH] there used to be, and maybe there still are, tracks where the coal trains used to come in on—on the—delivering coal. And these were open cars and the coal would be, you know, piled high, like to—almost to overflowing. And they would come in there. I don't know where they were going, whether that was their drop-off point or whether they'd just passed through there. But it was about a mile away. And very often, the—they would hit the coal so high that it stood in peaks on the—the open cars. And some of it would fall off on the tracks. So my mother would get up at four o'clock in the morning. And she'd bundle her legs up with—with sacks, with old rags, with anything at all, you know, because it would be bitter, bitter cold. We had no steam heat, of course. We didn't even have money for coal in the stove. So she would—you know, most people would have—there would be a place in the cellar where you would have a ton put. You must have heard of that. You know, they'd have a ton of coal delivered and you would go up every couple of days and bring up buckets of coal. Well, we seldom—we seldom had—had coal. Or they would have a man deliver sacks of coal. We seldom had that. One of the places we lived in, the hot water was also made by your own coal from the coal stove. The stove had a connection to a boiler that stood in a corner. And if you—if your stove was going, then you had—then the water in the boiler was hot. And I remember when—when it was very cold and, like, on Shabbos [PH] we always—my mother always managed to get that stove going on Shabbos. The boiler would be hot and we would stand by the boiler with our backs—our backs to the boiler to warm up. And we would sit—on Friday nights we would sit all around as the stove—my mother would open the doors of the stove, which was still hot after she baked the challa. And we would

put our feet in—you know, in the bakery compartment to warm up like that. But—so she would go to this. Like, four o'clock in the morning she would take a basket—you know, tote bags. You know, sacks. And she would bundle herself up and she would walk—it had to be at least a mile away—to Greenpoint; we lived in Williamsburg—and picked the coal off the tracks and fill up as much as she could carry. And God knows, she was a small—my mother was a very small woman. How she would carry back—it's superhuman how much she would carry back—of coal that fell on the tracks. And she would have enough to light the stove to warm up the house, because this stove was in the kitchen. There was no other heating, no other heating. All the other rooms had to be heated by what—what was in the stove. And if the stove had no—no—no coal in the stove or wood, she would gather twigs—twigs along the street. You know, if they fell in somebody's—you know, from the trees—twigs she would bring in and—and she made all our own clothes. She made our clothes for many, many, many years, our underwear, our clothes, everything. She was—my mother was a remarkable, remarkable person. Remarkable.

LEVINE: How was it for you initially without knowing the language? Do you remember that?

ZIMMERMAN: I was—I was—of course, I didn't go out on the street to play because I couldn't speak English, you know, and the kids would make fun of me. Greenhorn. They called me Greenhorn. "Greenhorn, greenhorn." But after my—my sisters were born, the twins were born—my mother had two miscarriages first and then she finally had my twin sisters. And I was almost six when they were born, and we moved to a larger apartment and that was across the street from a school [unclear].

LEVINE: Was this also Manhattan or—

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, on 99<sup>th</sup>. This was on 99<sup>th</sup> Street between Second and Third Avenue. And it was across the street. No, it had to be before they were born—across the street from a school. And I saw all these children going to school. And I had cousins; these little girls were going to school too, and I wanted to go to school. So—but I was only five years old and my—they told my father I had to be six to go to school. So he went—since I had no birth certificate anyway, since I came from the other side, and I didn't even have a proper passport or anything, my father went to a notary public and filled out an affidavit that I was six years old. And I don't know for what reason, he even changed my birthday. My birthday is really in December. He made me 14 months older. He gave me an

October 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, a year older, and I went to school. My first day—I'll never forget my first day at school. I was five. I was in first grade and it wasn't even the first day of school. It must have been midterm. And the teacher talked and I didn't know a word that she was saying. And she yelled at me because I wasn't writing something or other right, and all I could say was, "I greenhorn. I greenhorn. I greenhorn. I greenhorn." That's all I knew how to say. But somehow or other—now, this is—I don't know how it happened. I don't remember the rest of that first—it was—they used to have two classes a year, two promotions a year in those days. Every six months was promotion. At the end of that term I was promoted to a rapid advance class, a 1B2A. And I did 1B2A in one term. And then I was promoted to a 2B3A, one term again.

LEVINE: You were speaking by now.

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I learned speaking very quickly. And I must have done very, very well because I was promoted to these rapid-advance classes. I was doing two terms work in one, so that I had 1A, 1B2A, 2B3A. Then I was promoted to a 3B, a whole term in 3B. And my father said, "What happened to you? Do you mean to tell me you're going to spend a whole term just doing one grade, 3B? A whole term you're going to spend in 3B?" Well, I spent a whole term in 3B. I disgraced them. Then I was promoted to a 4A4B and then after that I spent a whole term in every grade after that. And when I was promoted to the 8A we lived across the street from the school again. It was convenient. You know, my mother felt with all of us—you know, the six of us—it's convenient to have a school nearby. I woke up on the first day of July and I looked out of the window and there's a whole line of kids outside the school lined up. And I was in—I was promoted to 8A at that time. It was the eighth grade school. And I walked across the street to see what they were all doing there. And they said if you had—they were registering for summer school. If you were left back you could go to summer school, or if you had A on your report card, A, B+, A on your report card. A for effort, B+ for work, A for conduct, that those were the report card marks. There were three marks. The first mark was effort; the second mark was work and the third mark was deportment. If you had A for effort, B+ for work, or A, and A in deportment, you could, if they had room, register for advanced placement in summer school. So I said, "Of course, I'm going to do that." So I, for the six weeks of summer school I did 8A. That—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming—

ZIMMERMAN: When my—

LEVINE: —on the second tape—

ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: —with Mrs. Augusta Zimmerman.

ZIMMERMAN: I must tell you this. When my twin sisters were born, I was nearly six years old. And my father was having another one of his very, very bad times. And my mother didn't—there was not money enough for milk in the house for the babies. So she—somebody said, "You could give them bali [PH] water. It was water that bali had been cooked in and you just drained out the water, and that's what they got in their bottles instead of milk. And then somebody told her that there was a city baby health station. See, the immigrants, we knew nothing. There were no organizations who could help us or point or—or—or guide us or—or give us. There were no welfare, no—

LEVINE: So you—

ZIMMERMAN: Of course, nothing in welfare.

LEVINE: So you never connected with HIAS or any other kind of assoc—

ZIMMERMAN: HIAS—HIAS only helped bring people here, as far as I know. That's—that's—that's what HIAS did. Somebody told her about a—a—that—that the city had a health station, a baby health station. And that was, oh, I don't know. It was a good six, seven blocks away. And what they wanted you to do was bring the babies in so that they could—you know, the doctors could watch over them and give them their vaccinations when they needed them and weigh them and measure them. You had to bring them once a month for—for care. This was the beginning of—of—to me, it was a new thought, anyway, you know. And you could get milk there every morning for the babies at—at five cents for two quarts. Two quarts, which was probably—maybe—maybe milk was five cents a quart at that time. I don't know. Whatever it was, it was much, much less than in the—in the—than it would be in the grocery. So—and I was six—six and a half years old. So that was my job every morning for—this continued until probably—I must have been about 11 or 12 years old, as each new baby was born. I got up in the morning

early and I walked those six, seven, eight blocks to the baby health station to get the milk for the day for the babies. And this continued for many, many years because there were more babies and more babies. And my mother made me a little—little tote bag made of some red flannel, red fabric that she had to carry the bottles back, and my job, six and a half, seven years old. And this was—I had to cross many—of course, the traffic wasn't what it is today. But I had to go through an area where there were all these Irish—Irish boys, these Irish kids, these wild Irish kids. And they used to watch for me. And I carried this little red bag, this little—little tote bag with the two quarts of milk for five cents. There was this big, fat lady. I'd hand her the nickel and give her my name. She'd check it off, you know, that the babies were registered and my mother would have to bring them, you know, every so often to them. And they would lie and wait for me. They called me Little Red Riding Hood because I carried this—this red thing. And they would swing at me. They would get in front of me, not let me pass. They had—they had black stockings. In those days, boys wore knickers, you know—pants just to the knees and high, black-ribbed stockings. That was the—the attire for boys. They would have an old, black stocking, one of their long, black stockings full with flour or white chalk or something. Something white—white powdery stuff was in those stockings. And as I would go by there would be a whole wall of these little Irish—Irish boys swinging these—these—they would hold the stocking by the end and swing it at me, so that this chalk always hurt me and it got all over my clothes too. And one day—but I—this had to be done. I mean, there was—there was no point in any coming home to cry to my mother. She had plenty—plenty of other—other things on her mind. One day, they—they hit—they hit me with a stick that had chalk on it. They had chalked up, like they used to do for Halloween.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: They would take a long stick, a flat stick, and put a lot of chalk on it of all different colors and—and—and—and hit people—passersby with that and chalk up their clothing. One day, they hit me with this stick and broke one of the bottles of milk. They were glass—you know, glass bottles. I cried and I didn't know what to do. And I can't come home with—with just one. And the milk is pouring out on the sidewalk. I went—I remember going back to the—to the—

LEVINE: Baby clinic.

ZIMMERMAN: —babies clinic. And I said—I said to the woman—I didn't know what to say—I said to the woman she gave me a cracked bottle.

Oh, I knew it was not so but I didn't know—I didn't know how to handle this situation. And she—she was—she was an—a goyeh, [PH] you know, a—looked down on us immigrants anyway. They all did, even the teachers. You know, these—these immigrant unwashed—unwashed, unmannered immigrant kids. And she was a big, fat, bosomy woman. And she said, “I did not. Now, you get out of here right this very minute.” So I came home crying with the broken—the broken glass and this one bottle of milk. And somehow or other, my mother managed, you know. But—but this was what I did for years and years and years. This was my—seven days a week I would go to the baby health station. When we moved to Brooklyn, the first thing my mother found was a—was a similar baby health station. And Saturday—every third Saturday I would have to take whatever—who was the baby—I was eight years old or nine years old—the current baby. That was my job on those alternate Saturdays, to take the current baby to be weighed and measured. You know, to check in and to be checked and weighed and measured.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember anything those Irish—that little band of Irish boys said to you? Were—were they [unclear]?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, they said all the usual things. You know, “You Jew bastard. You sheeny.” [PH] I don't know. The sheeny was a word that I heard a lot.

LEVINE: Were they themselves immigrants too, do you think?

ZIMMERMAN: I have no idea. I have no idea where they came from. But I—I had to walk this gauntlet every single morning. And I didn't dare complain because my mother had, you know, plenty—plenty of other—plenty of other problems. Plenty of other problems, you know. She had to make do for a family—family like—like ourselves.

LEVINE: So what did you do after you finished eighth grade?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, this brings me to something else that's interesting. The pharmacist—the neighborhood pharmacist was the wise man of the area. See, the pharmacist was apt to be—was an educated man. He was apt to be American, surely more American than—than all of us immigrants. And the pharmacist was like—like the wise man. You needed any advice on anything, you asked the pharmacist. And usually, they were friendly and very, very helpful. They were like—like a—like a father, like a grandfather in the area. And you—you would just go to the pharmacist. Of course, if you needed a

telephone, that was the only place that had a telephone. You didn't have a telephone in your house. For years and years and years we didn't have a telephone in the house. The pharmacist—the telephone—if—if my—for instance, my uncle wanted to talk to my father on the telephone, he would call the pharmacy number. And the pharmacy had a lot of little boys hanging out who would—who would just be waiting, because if he went to call, than there's a call for Mr. Jacobs. So one of the little boys would run to—to the block or two blocks to call Mr. Jacobs to the phone. And he'd get a penny for his—for running and bringing him. So that was—that was—that was how that worked. The pharmacist was—you asked his advice on—on—on everything. All kinds of—anything that pertained to—mattered to living—living was the pharmacist. Now—

LEVINE: You mean, other than health. You mean—

ZIMMERMAN: Other than health. Oh, yes. Any problem—any problems that you had, you went to the pharmacist because he was a smart man. He was an educated man. And he was—he was, you know, Jewish. Usually they were Jewish. And he was American, accustomed to the ways. Now, when I graduated from eighth grade—in those days, girls used to graduate at the eighth grade schools and they'd go to work, factories, stores, whatever. That was it because they had no choice. Also, if there was a boy in the family, the boy would—would probably get more of an education while the sisters all worked to support this boy. This was a very common thing. The girls—the girls all worked as soon as they could to put the boy through college. That's how so many boys got to be doctors and lawyers and—and teachers and everything, because the girls in the family worked to put him through. Now, so the girls would go to work. If there was a—a family who was really—who really tried hard for their girls, they used to send them to—to high school—to business schools. There used to be these business schools that for a year you—you had to pay, but you had to pay for this. And they'd teach them to be stenographers or typists or bookkeepers, such as they were. If they really wanted to do well by their daughters they would send them to—it was a three-year high school course. It was called a commercial course. The four-year was the general and it was—prepared you for college. But the three-year was a commercial course and you could get a job in an office. So I remember that—that I—I brought home my papers at the end of eighth grade. "Where should I go now?" Now, mind you, I'm 11 years and one month old. And my father had to take the papers into the pharmacist to help him fill out what high school I was going to go to. The high school in the district was Eastern—Eastern District High School. We lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn at

that time. And the pharmacist—I don't think he knew me particularly. Maybe he had seen me come in. And he said to—and he said to my father, "This little girl, how old is she?" And my father said, "She's 11." And he said, "You're going to send—11? She finished eighth grade?" And he says, "All you can see for her future is—is—is a—a commercial course in a—in a high school?" My father thought that was—that was quite some, because—because all our neighbors, nobody got to go to high school. Either they went to work or they would take this business school course for, you know, six months. They would scrimp together money, you know, because pretty soon she'd work and she'd be able to pay it back. He said—he said, "With a—with a child as brilliant as that, that's all you can see for her future?" He had a good long talk with my father and he persuaded my father to—to let me go to Girls High School. Girls High in Brooklyn at that time was—it was not in our district. He said, "This child needs more of a future than that." And he persuaded my—my parents to send me to Girls High School. Now, at that time Girls High School was—was—I don't know if you're familiar with Brooklyn, but it was around the area of Brooklyn where they had the brownstone houses, where the judges—the judges lived and the bankers and the lawyers. And it was in a—in a good part of Brooklyn, off Fulton Street and Nostrand [PH] Avenue, you know. But that—it was—it was like a finishing school at that time. Girls High had a wonderful reputation. It was like a private finishing school where the rich—the rich kids lived there and they sent their daughters there. Now, what was I doing there? A fish out of water. Absolutely, a fish out of water. I—I—I had—where I grew up we didn't have the best manners. We didn't have the finesse that these girls had, coming from these wonderful homes. And what was I going to do? I graduated from—from Girls High. I was 15—15 and one month. Of course, I had after school jobs and Saturday jobs. I worked—I worked at Hernes [PH] Department Store on Saturdays. I used to get \$2—\$2 a day for the Saturday work. And I decided I would—I would become a teacher because at that time, when I was halfway through with high school, the teaching—there was a—you didn't have to go to college. It was a teacher's training school for a two-year course. The first year you went to school. The second year you did student teaching, a month of student teaching, a month back in school for the second year. And for the student teacher, you were paid \$2 a day, so my parents said, well, in fact, they would put me through one more year. Then I would be 16 and I had Saturday jobs and after school jobs and all kinds of—you know, whatever I could do. And—and then one—that one year. Then the second year I would do the student teaching and I would get some money already. So [unclear], they changed the rules midstream when I was in my last year of—of high school, they

changed it to a three-year course. And you had to go two years to school before you could do the student teaching, which was, of course, a terrible dilemma. But, as it turned out—it didn't turn out—turn [laughs]—so I was the first class that should have been three years. But because there would be no graduating class during that—

LEVINE: That year.

ZIMMERMAN: —intermediary period, they decided that the top, I don't know, five percent of the class would be permitted to go in two and a half years if they gave up their study hour and gave up lunch time and took extra courses and, you know, did outside work and got good marks and every—I was one of those. I got in on the two and a half. And what happened—the worst thing that happened was that they abolished the money for student teaching. You had to do the student teaching free of charge. So—but by that time I was so committed there wasn't anything else they could do to me. That's how—that's how I managed in this—this dreadful, dreadful poverty—how I managed to become a teacher.

LEVINE: And what was it like for you, coming out of an immigrant family and place in Brooklyn and going to this place that was—

ZIMMERMAN: The school?

LEVINE: —so upscale? How—did you see yourself changing in any way?

ZIMMERMAN: Well, of course. Of course.

LEVINE: What ways were—

ZIMMERMAN: Of course. I realized, you know, pretty soon. Now, you know, my mother—my mother would send me my lunch along and it would be like a peasant lunch. You know, not these dainty little sandwiches that these other girls came with, you know, and whatever she had in the house. I remember one time she had gribboniss [PH]. You remember—do you know gribboniss?

LEVINE: [unclear]

ZIMMERMAN: You don't know what they are?

LEVINE: I don't know.

ZIMMERMAN: They used to—when—they used to take the skin of the chicken. They used to buy the whole chickens, of course—the skin of the chicken, cut it up in small pieces and render the fat and what you got was—I think they call it in English cracklings.

LEVINE: Yes.

ZIMMERMAN: The cracklings were crisp, you know, like—and—and, you know, [unclear] and delicious. And it was something you discarded anyway. It had—you didn't buy it. So I remember my mother would fill up a sandwich with this. And the girls were, "What is this? What is this? What is that you're having for lunch?" Well, it took—it took me—and my mother used to cook—they didn't have the sliced bread that you bought. My mother would—you had him slice the bread and my mother wanted me to have—you know, because I was a skinny, frail, very poor eater. So when she cut the bread it was a—and a sandwich—and the girls used to look at me with these—these—these sandwiches and the different kind of shoes that I wore. I was in high school when I was wearing two different shoes already. One was a size two and a half and one was a six. These lace-up—these high, lace-up shoes.

LEVINE: So did you become Americanized—

ZIMMERMAN: Of course.

LEVINE: —during that period?

ZIMMERMAN: Of course.

LEVINE: Can you think of the ways that you picked up on to become more American?

ZIMMERMAN: Of course. Of course. I started to talk like them, you know, and some of their—you know, some of their manners—you know, their mannerisms and their manners. And I started to do my hair like these—these—these other girls. And I—I made some very good friends among—and they were mostly Gentile girls too. They were the—mostly Gentile. Very few Jewish girls went to—went to Girls High.

LEVINE: Was there a—

ZIMMERMAN: I was like a fish out of water.

LEVINE: Yeah. When—as you became more like they were, was there a kind of a rift with your family then?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, no.

LEVINE: No.

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, no, no, no. No, no. My mother was—was very pleased. My father was a little oblivious but my mother was very pleased that—that—that, you know, when we were going to be—I was going to be somebody. Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, and I started to teach school and wherever we went, you know, if—if I happened to be near her, or we were shopping even at the grocery, or, you know, wherever, she would point out—she would get into the conversation somehow about this—this brilliant daughter that she has who is now doing this or who was now in such and such a class. “Look at her. She’s such a child. And look at—look at how smart she is.” But not within my hearing. Never. Never the—you know, she would maneuver it so perfect strangers—she had to—she had to announce to perfect—she had to work it into the conversation about this—this brilliant, brilliant child that—that she had. But not—not that I would hear because it would turn my head, you know. She—my mother was of the—the old school. You’re not allowed to tell a child that you love him. Even when I had my children—when I had my little girls—and you know I’m proud of them and love them, and I say, “I love you,” and “You’re so beautiful,” and “Look how pretty you are,” or “You’re so bright.” And, “That was such a smart thing you did,” or, “When you did this situation you handled it so well,” my mother thought that was terrible. You’re never supposed to tell a child that—that—because he’ll take advantage of you. The old school. You were not supposed to praise a child because he—he would—it would place him in a position where he could lord it over you or—or take advantage of you. Or he would feel so secure in—in—in your love that he—that he might do naughty things if he—feel he could get away with them because you loved him so much. That was the old school that they brought that—they brought that from—from—from Poland. You never—never supposed to tell the children that you loved them. But then, of course, when my sisters had their children it was—it was different. My sister, she loved—she—and of course, ultimately with me too—my mother lived with me for many, many years—ultimately, you know, of course, she loved them and she showed them the love. And my—it was all right with my sisters. But I, being the first—I had many hurdles. I had many hurdles. I could never have a pair of skates, for example, even if somebody would give them to me, because “So and so fell and broke an arm. So and So.’s child fell

and broke an arm and it's not safe. You can't—you can't have a—you can't have skates." My sisters had skates. I had to wear longy winter—you—you know about the longy winter underwear. You know, the longies. The houses were bitter cold. You had shirts—you know, long shirts with long sleeves to here and the long underwear here. And—and you hated that because when you put stockings over it, that there will always these lumps. You know, this longy—this—they never fit. There were always these lumps. But I had to wear this. I had to wear this long underwear and I had to wear it into the middle of June. That's what my mother said, to the middle of June when it's really warm. And I remember one day going to the library on a Saturday in June, early in June, and it was a long walk to the library. And I went every Saturday, all the books I could get. And—and I had this long underwear because it was not yet the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. And I must have come home. I think I was feeling a little faint from the heat, this long, long walk in a very hot day and wearing this—this—this longy underwear. And I think she took one look at me and she—I probably—probably looked sick too. And she said, all right, I could take off the longy underwear and it wasn't the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. [laughter] I had to fight—and my sisters didn't have to wear the longy underwear, see. My sisters got a lot of things that I used to have to fight for.

LEVINE: Can you think of any other attitudes that either your mother or father had that they tried to instill in you? Is there anything—

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, always—always be the best. Always be the best. If you—if we came home from school at any time and said that the teacher had punished us for something or other, "Don't tell me any more. [speaking in foreign language.] You probably deserved it." That was—she didn't want to hear anything. The teacher was always right. "You must have—whatever it was, you deserved it." And she went on to something else. Now, maybe I didn't deserve it but that was the attitude. The teacher was always right. I wish there were a little more of that today.

LEVINE: Were—did you—

ZIMMERMAN: And if you were not—and if you were not the best—I had to be the best. When I graduated from teacher's training school—I subsequently took courses at night and got my bachelor's anyway, you know, to make up, because it was not a four-year college course at that time—bachelor's [unclear] work. Even after I had the children I was working on my master's already. But when I graduated from teacher's training school and I took the—the—it was a—an examination, you know, that they gave twice a year, the

teacher's—the qualifying examination to teach in the New York City schools. And there were 1,500 that took it that—that—together with me. About 750 passed—748 passed the exam. They appointed you in order of rank on the list, you know, in order of your mark. Out of that 750 they probably appointed the first 300 right off at once. You know, the rest of the list maybe had to wait till the next term or the next, you know, three months later or so to be appointed. They went down the list. I came out 96<sup>th</sup> on that list. Ninety—now, mind you, I was 17 ½ years old and I was in competition with these girls who were 20—

LEVINE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: —21. And the list was published. I got my mark in the paper. They used to publish. There was a school page where they would publish these—these lists when—the qualifying lists every time. And I was 96<sup>th</sup>—my father counted. I was 96<sup>th</sup> on the list. And he said—I'll never forget this. He said to me, “You mean to tell me there were 95 people there who were smarter than you?”

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt when he said that?

ZIMMERMAN: No, I said, “But, Pa.” You know, “Pa.” I said, “But I'm two years—two and a half years younger than all these girls. And—and what difference will it make anyway? I'll be appointed next month anyway. I'll get—I'll get a school. I'll be appointed as a teacher.” “Well, you should have done better than that. To think—to think that 95 people were smarter than my daughter.” You see, they had nothing themselves. They had to live in their children. They were nobodies. I mean, they were, you know, unsuccessful in a strange land, you know, having—having financial problems always and always, finding it hard to cope with, you know, what situations were. And—and they lived in their children. Their children had to be the best. “Ninety-five people were smarter than you?”

LEVINE: Can you think of any other instances where they were living through you?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, always. It was—it was—I don't know. I can't—can't think of anything [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: Things will come to me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: Things will come to me. Let me see. I jotted down. I jotted down some things. Ah, the milk station. I told you about the milk station. The red tote bag, the strikes, the telephone, the pharmacist. What'd I tell you? The paper father, the ship. I don't know what else—what else—

LEVINE: Well, how about when you—when you started teaching? Did—was that a whole new world for you—

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, surely. Oh, surely. There were—oh, I remember that—that when I decided to go to teacher's training school—see, my father's brother, who had been here before—you know, before my father—

LEVINE: Okay.

ZIMMERMAN: —sort of—even though he was my father's younger brother, he was sort of the mentor in the family because he was—he had been here three years already and he was American. He knew everything and everything had to clear through him. And my father's nature was such that he took second place to his brother. I mean, whatever his brother said, that was it. And I remember that my—my—my uncle and aunt and the children came—came to visit us one Sunday. And my father announced that—that—that I was going to be—oh, he asked, you know, what am I going to do and—his—his girls went right straight from—one of his daughters didn't go to high school. She—from eighth grade, she got a job and his other daughter may have gone to high school; I'm not sure. Maybe she went to business school and got a job. And here I was. I spent four years in high school and—and I—I was going to go to—oh, and my uncle was incensed. "Teaching! That's the worst thing that anybody can be is a teacher. Teachers are only old maids. And—and you don't have to go to college. And—and to—to wash—to—to wash the floor and to wash the clothes over a washboard, you don't have—you don't have to go to college to—because—because ultimately, you know, that's—that's your allotted life you'll be, you know, to—to carry out the garbage and to diaper the babies and to cook and clean house." And he was—he thought—"And teachers are surely old maids. And—and why do you want to let her do that?" And my father was beginning to waver already too because his brother said. But my mother—my mother held fast. She said, yes, I was going to have that chance.

LEVINE: And thank goodness for the pharmacist. [chuckles]

ZIMMERMAN: Yeah, yeah. Thank God for the pharmacist.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: Otherwise, I would have probably been a bookkeeper or a stenographer. Those—those were good, if you were a bookkeeper or a stenographer. Those were girls' jobs, bookkeeper or a stenographer.

LEVINE: So then when did you meet your husband?

ZIMMERMAN: I had been teaching a short while when I met him.

LEVINE: And was he—

ZIMMERMAN: He was—

LEVINE: —American-born or—

ZIMMERMAN: He was American-born but his parents had just come over.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: And—and he too—he—he struggled his way. He struggled his way through—through everything. But his—his father was a carpenter. See, he had a good skill. His father made a living. They were not well to do but his father always made a living. There was always a need for a carpenter. And he—he didn't do private jobs. He worked for one of these woodworking—where they made cabinets and they made, you know, various appliances, you know, out of—he—he worked there. And they—in fact, they owned a four-family house, just mortgaged to the hilt but they owned a house. See, they were homeowners. And—but they couldn't do anything for him besides high school. He went to high school and he hoped to be a—he wanted to be a dentist. He always wanted to be a dentist. He got there but it wasn't—wasn't easy. They—they said, "You're on your own. Once—once you finish high school, if you can put yourself through school, that's—that's it. We'll give you a—a bed. We'll give you food. But everything else is up to you, even a haircut or clothing or bus fare or, you know, whatever is up to you." So he—he did. He—he went to City College. He dropped out of college after two years because he needed to make some money. So he was selling vacuum cleaners, Hoover vacuum cleaners. He sold vacuum cleaners for a year and sold—and put aside enough money to see him—to go back to college and see him through, you know, to pay. Summers, he worked as a waiter in the country at the—what is now the Roly [PH] Hotel. He worked there for many,

many, many years as a waiter. He was their number one waiter. He served more people than—than anybody. He would come out with these—these trays that were—he was skinny—you know, tall but very skinny and didn't look as if he had much stamina. But apparently, he had enough stamina. He would carry these—these heavy trays for—where the other waiters would have, maybe, 25 people, he would have 45—

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

ZIMMERMAN: Now, you never saw a man without a hat and they always get a new hat for Rosh Hashanah. So he always worked in Adams Hats on Saturdays—Saturdays and Sundays before the Jewish holidays. At Christmas time he delivered flowers. Valentine's Day he delivered flowers. He had—he worked at—at Kleins [PH] pinning dresses on—Friday—Friday nights after school—he was in dental school—he would go to Kleins on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and pin tickets on dresses all night. If they had a lot of work, it would be all night. Sometimes, there wasn't that much work. They would work till two o'clock in the morning. They had 75 cents an hour.

LEVINE: Now, were you married when he was in dental school?

ZIMMERMAN: We married when he was in the middle of dental school because I was already teaching.

LEVINE: And how about—how many—well, what was his name?

ZIMMERMAN: Morris. Morris Zimmerman, yes.

LEVINE: Morris Zimmerman. And how many children did you have?

ZIMMERMAN: Two. We have two girls, Carol is—Carol is the younger one and I have—and Laura.

LEVINE: Laura.

ZIMMERMAN: Laura is older than Carol.

LEVINE: Okay, and how about your life now? How is this time now—

ZIMMERMAN: My life now? My life now? I—it's a lonely life. I'm—I—I have two sisters who live nearby but I try not to be a burden. I'm very self-sufficient. I have—I never feel that the walls are closing in on me,

even sometimes when I can't get out for days at a time. The weather is bad or something, because I have—I have good things that I can do. I always have my piano and I play for my own, but I play and I'm learning new things. And I listen to good music all the time on the radio. I do this taping for the blind. I have—

LEVINE: Talk about that.

ZIMMERMAN: I—I tape record Yiddish—Yiddish books. Now, don't ask me how I learned Yiddish, how I learned to read Yiddish. They—they taught me the alphabet.

LEVINE: Your mother?

ZIMMERMAN: My mother taught me the alphabet and from thereon I'm on my own. See, Yiddish is—it's like Spanish in that way. The sounds—the letters have only that one sound. Whatever it sounds like, that's how you say it. So then when my father would come home with the newspaper, "The [unclear]," I began to—I said, "Oh, I can read this headline. You know, I can read this word, shiff [PH]. Shiff. I can read"—you know, something or other, the headline of the paper. After awhile, I can read the whole headline. And after awhile I could read a sentence; I could read a paragraph. I could read whole articles after awhile. I became fluent in reading Yiddish. Self—just self taught. That's all.

LEVINE: How about the piano? How did you learn that?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, they thought it was very important for a girl to know how to play the piano. And I don't know how they managed to get me the piano lessons.

LEVINE: When you were a little girl?

ZIMMERMAN: Little girl, yes, yes. They bought me a piano. They must have—they never went into hock because they never borrowed. I mean, borrowing was something that was—it was just not done. But they must have put by I don't know how many pennies. And then—then again, it was the story of the oldest one will teach the younger ones. But somehow, that never worked out because by the time they got to be old enough, I had these after school jobs. I always had after school jobs and my own homework and everything and I never—I started—I started—I think I taught my sister, Rose, some. But she never took to it somehow. When it came to the other sisters, it just didn't work out. I was not home enough. Not home enough to—to—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ZIMMERMAN: And so I took lessons for a few years.

LEVINE: How—how would you—what would you say about the fact of being the oldest child in this family who had come from Europe? What were the—what were the—

ZIMMERMAN: Well—

LEVINE: —the sides of that for you?

ZIMMERMAN: The fact that I came from—to—I don't think my sisters are even aware of it today, you know, that—you know, I mean, I—

LEVINE: That you came from Europe?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: That you didn't start out here?

ZIMMERMAN: No, they know that I did.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: I mean, as—they know it as a fact. But I don't think—I don't think it makes me any different, except sometimes when we start to reminisce, you know, about—about some of the things. We start to reminisce and then it might come up that, "Oh, yes. I remember this." Or, "I was here," or, "I was there." It was—and then, of course, all those—all those brothers and sisters of my mothers that didn't get here were all—all—all wiped out, you know, in the Holocaust, because, as I pointed out earlier, they were right across the border from Prussia. And the Germans marched right in. And then, of course, you know, this—this scorch—what they call the scorched earth policy—if the—the—the country that's being invaded is—is—is about to be invaded, they will set fire to everything themselves so that the invaders will have nothing—nothing to gain. So they—they—they set fire in 1914 at the very outbreak of World War I. See, we had come in 1912. But my mother's father and her stepmother and all the brothers and sisters were still there. But they didn't need to come. See, they were—they had this wealthy father and they were all in business with the father. They were doing well. They didn't want to come. My mother needed to come because she had nothing. [chuckles]

The—the—the—they came—the Germans came marching in at the very outbreak of World War I. And the—the—the Russians set fire to the whole—to the whole village, to everything so that they will have only scorched earth when they come in. And when my mother's father—when my grandfather saw everything going up in smoke that he had built and—and built up, he had apoplexy. They called it apoplexy in those days. It was a stroke. Apoplexy's—he had a stroke immediately when he saw everything, all his—all his possessions, all his fields, his land, his cattle, his buildings, his—you know, whatever he had. He had apoplexy and he was unconscious for two days and he died. That was it, finished. And the rest—the rest of them were all—they had to get the population away from the—from the invaders also. So they herded them into—into trains, like cattle. Cattle trains, actually, regardless of family, regardless of—of who goes with whom. Just, "Come on. You, you, you, you, you. Get into these cattle cars." And they shipped them to Siberia. And there they were for the duration of the war. Families lost each other, couldn't—didn't know whether anybody was alive or—or dead or—or anything. At the end of the war they came drib—in dribs and drabs back from Siberia and found each other. My mother's real brother—you know, her one older brother who also had nothing, like—you know, how—how—just—just like out of Cinderella. I mean, these—these other sons had everything. This son had nothing, just like my moth—

LEVINE: Now, did he go to Siberia?

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, he and his wife. He and his wife had been separated and some of the children. They got back from Siberia, established themselves back again where they were. And he always struggled because he had nothing. He had no business; he had no trade. He just struggled along, was very poor all through the years. And the others—the others that came back had—they had business sense or they had connections or something. It was only a matter of time and they established themselves again. And—and they had no reason. Now, as World War II came, right—right across the border, there they were. And they were all wiped out, with the exception of one. One sister, the one who I said used to—

LEVINE: [unclear].

ZIMMERMAN: —take crumbs from the table—not crumbs, you know, but take little things, or who showed her the alphabet, who taught her how to read and write, she became interested in the Pioneer, the Howlitzzen [PH] movement when she was a teenager, 15, 16, and—and took training with these groups that were preparing to go to

Israel. And that was way before World War II. She became interested in that movement and—and—and—and left—oh, and we used to send them money, you know, by the time we had established ourselves a little. My mother, poor as we were, they—she always managed to send them some money for Pesach, for— for holidays, for this, for that, you know, to—to her brother, this— this one brother. And—and when the—when World War II broke out, I was on the point of bringing one of his—one of his daughters over. You know, her—her whole brother. She was a girl of—in her early 20s. And since I had a good job—I was a teacher and I had a bank account. I already had one—one of my children. I already had Laura at that point. But I was a good sponsor. In those days, you had to have a good sponsor who would make sure that this person would not be a burden. So I had papers filled out in Washington. We were just waiting for the final—it was a matter of days before her final papers would come through and I would have been able to bring her. And she, in turn—you know, as—as—as it goes, she would have brought the rest. But there was this—this terrible conflagration and they were gone, all of them gone. The only one who survived of this entire, beautiful, beautiful family was this one who went to Israel.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, how about you? We should probably get near the end here because we're getting close on time.

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Let me ask you, how do you think about it all now, the fact that you came here at practically four years old. Your family came. You were immigrants. You lived and worked hard and [unclear]—

ZIMMERMAN: Well, I was—it was not unique. It was not unique. We all struggled and this was—this was the thing. This was the way we all did. We—we were—we grew up in that kind of atmosphere.

LEVINE: Do you think it made a difference to you as a person, having—

ZIMMERMAN: Having worked? Having struggled?

LEVINE: Having struggled and—

ZIMMERMAN: It gave me strength. It gave me strength. I think—I think my children praise me even to this day. "Mother, no matter what the problem is, you will find some—some way to either fix it or—or—or—or change or—or something. You will always come up with—

with something to”—yeah, Carol—Carol, especially, feels that way about it. Yeah. Yeah, she—yes.

LEVINE: That’s wonderful. Now, is there anything else that you’d like to say before we close?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, just—just shut this off a minute and give me a chance. Yeah, there was just [tape off/on]—

LEVINE: [unclear]

ZIMMERMAN: When I was in high school and we—we lived—I mean, we had these—these dining room chairs and the sawdust was—would be on the floor. And my mother would be constantly—my mother took on work from factories, you know, that we could do at home. We’d sit around the table at the end of the day and everybody had a—had to—had—had—had to help—help to do this. And—but I had a friend that I knew from high school who lived around the corner who was the youngest in her family. She had older brothers and sisters. She had sisters who—who would give her their dresses. They could—she could wear their dresses or sometimes they would have money enough to—if they were working, they would give her the things they didn’t need anymore. They lived in a one-family house. We lived in a crowded little apartment where were three in a bed, you know. Deplorable. And she lived in a private house and she would have all the—all the kids would come to her house on Friday night, you know, to—to sing, to dance. You know, high school kids. You know, for—and—and I used to think, ‘She is so fortunate. She has pocket money.’ Her father had a little—a little stand in a—in a market where he sold pickles and lox and herring and—by—actually, when I look back on it, [laughs] he was a poor man too. But by my standard, she lived in a one-family house. She had a big house where her friends could come in. And—and, you know, boys and girls and we could have fun, and we could have parties and sing and laugh and dance and everything. And she had pocket money that her sisters would give her from time to time. She certainly didn’t ever have to go hungry. And her mother didn’t have to make do with meals the way my mother had to make do, buy the chicken, that four o’clock [unclear] Shabbos, because, you know, whatever leftover chicken the butcher he knew it was—wouldn’t keep anymore anyway. That’s when she would buy it for half price and she’d hurry home to make—to make Shabbos before it got dark. You know, always the last minute, hurry, hurry, hurry to make the Shabbos even because she couldn’t afford to buy it at the morning’s prices. And—and I—we lost sight of each other after high school. You know, I moved away; she moved away. She

married; I married. One time I was in somebody's house. I was at the home of one of the teachers who taught in the same school. And she said, "Come over Saturday night. I'm having some friends over." And who should be this friend but this—this one? And I—oh! You know, we looked at—it was years and years, and here we were mothers of children already. And we started to reminisce about the olden days and she said to me, "Oh," she said. "How I envied you in those days." "Dottie, what are you talking about? Do you remember? Look at me. You know who you're talking to?" "Oh," she said. "Of course I remember." And she, you know, told me all these things. "I remember this and this and this." But she said, "I envied you so much." "So what? In God's name, what did I have for anybody to envy?" She said, "You had a young mother." Is that—that's—that's—isn't that an interesting story? "You had a young mother." Now, she was the youngest of a whole big family and her—her parents were considerably older than mine, and she envied me the fact that I had a young mother. We didn't have a chair to sit on. We slept three, four in a bed because we—you know, all of us, you know, with six children in a four-room apartment. We had furniture that was falling apart. Shall I tell you the work that my mother used to take out of the factory to do? I didn't mention what it was. You know the bristles that they used to make brushes out of? You know, the real hair bristles, they come from pigs. You know, pigs' hair. That pigs' hair—some of it is white; some of it is black. That pigs' hair has to be sorted out into long and short and black from white. That's what we used to do in my mother's kosher house after supper. We would spread out—spread out the special tablecloth. They—you got it from the factory in bundles. That was the pigs' hair, like—like a brush of bristles, except it was formless—you know, just bristles. And they were cut more or less to size, a bundle this thick tied around with rope of hairs. And you had to—you—you put them—you put them out—you know, you take little bunches and—and—and go through them like this, pick out the black ones, pick out the black ones, pick out the black ones. Put them separate; tie these back in. And no matter how careful you were, the haser [PH] hair was every place. And to my mother—to us, you know, religious—as religious-observant as we were, there was nothing—nothing more poisonous in our lives than this haser hair, pigs' hair—

LEVINE: Right.

ZIMMERMAN: —in the house. And—and we had to go—we had to walk—had to be a mile and a half to east New York to get it, to this sort of factory to get it. Pounds and pounds of it in—in big, big baskets that we used to bring it home. You had to sort it out, put it back into—you

know, to the pack and then white separate, the black separate, back into the little bundle. Had to bring it back there again and get a new one.

LEVINE: This—this was homework, what they called homework.

ZIMMERMAN: Homework, yes. The whole family used to sit around the table and this was—and at the end of—I remember my mother said, “We need a new table.” She said, “This table is falling apart.” She said, “If we all work very hard we can have a new table for Pesach.” And we all worked very, very hard and we got a new table for Pesach.

LEVINE: I think that’s a beautiful place to end. It’s a poignant story, as so many of your stories are. [chuckles] I want to thank you so much for a wonderful interview.

ZIMMERMAN: I must tell you another story. One of my mother’s brothers, half-brothers, was—he was about 13 or 14 at this—at the time of this story. And of course he was this privileged kid, you know, who had—actually, maybe in the terms in rich—in terms of rich—maybe they were not so rich, but from where my mother sat, they were—they well-to-do. He had—the cows had given birth and there was one calf that he particularly took to. This was his pet calf. He’d rush home from hider [PH] everyday to—you know, this—to pet this little calf. And the calf learned to follow him every place. One day he comes home from hider and there’s no calf. And he came to his father and his—he said, you know, “Where’s the calf?” His father said, “So and so—some goy—some peasant that came in offered me”—he wanted this calf for a long time and he refused to sell him because he said, “It was your pet.” But he said, “He offered me”—it must have been a very beautiful calf—he said, “He offered me so much money to sell it that I couldn’t resist.” He said, “So I sold it to him.” He said, “So you’ll get another calf. The cows are always calving. You’ll get a new calf. What’s the difference?” Well, he cried and he was very upset. And how could his father have done this? He knew how much he loved the calf. He ran away from home. He took money out of the till. There was money in the till. He took money out of the till. I don’t know how he made his way across the borders and across—bought himself—he was tall for his age. He was probably 14, maybe 15. The way they tell it he was 13 or 14; maybe he was 15. He bought himself a ticket. [phone rings] Excuse me. Came to America on his own. [unclear] out of the till and ran away from home in a—in a fit of, you know, spoiled—spoiled anger.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ZIMMERMAN: Somehow, he made his way. He came to America. His mother—that was my mother's stepmother—had a sister here who lived in the Bronx. And she would write these letters, "Oh, [unclear], if you could only come. And I would love to have you and I'll find a place for you," and everything like that. So he thought, oh, sure. He has somebody to go to. He made his way to the Bronx where his aunt was living and, of course, when he got there she had a house full of little kids and she was not all that well to do. And she was not that—very happy to take him in. He stayed with her only a short time and then he had to make it on his own. He's 14 years old. He got himself a—he was very enterprising. See, they—they learned in—in the business, you know, from—from their father. He was a go-getter. They learned. He got himself, I don't know, a series of jobs. One job he got in the men's—men's clothing factory. First, they took him in to sweep the place up. And he said he had no place to go, so they let him sleep in a corner on—on a bundle of—of cut-out fabric. You know, the—a bundle of—of things in a corner. He would sweep up the place. He would make himself useful. He slept there. He bought himself some food from the couple of pennies that they would pay him for that. He worked his way around. He was very eager and a good worker and big and strong. He worked his way. They taught him—they started to teach him. The boss loved him. They started to teach him how to—some of the—how to do some of the sewing on the machines. He worked himself—they taught him, of course, the least complicated procedures. He worked himself up to the—the highest skill in men's clothing, which is a pocket maker. You know, they go up the line. The boys who sew straight seams, you know, where it doesn't matter so much. Then, if you're a little more skillful, you do lapels—lapel. You—then you do collars because, you know, that has to be carefully tailored. Lapels, collars have to fit well. Pocket maker. They were not patch pockets; they were these—these—these—those pockets had to be very carefully tailored.

LEVINE: Inside, yeah.

ZIMMERMAN: He learned that. That was the highest-paying skill. And they were piece workers and he could turn out more than anybody. He worked himself up and he was known in the trade as Abie the Horse because he could work like a horse, all hours, piecework. He could earn more than anybody. So he—he came, of all the—of all the others. And he was—he—he never got his own factory or anything. You know, he was always a worker. But he was—it was the highest paid of all the—of all the jobs in the men's tailoring business.

LEVINE: Now, your mother kept in contact with him?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But it—it—at a distance. Nobody—nobody was ready to help us in any way. Nobody was—nobody was going to help us. My mother was always resentful of the fact that—that my father's brothers never taught him any—any other skills. They were—they were all in the men's tailoring business. Why didn't they teach him something? But then again, you could say, "Why didn't he insist on learning something?" My mother always felt that they—they should have. You know, they should have—they should have done something for their brother. They should have taught him, not that—give—not give anything, because too proud—he would be too proud to accept anything, but at least teach him something. But then maybe—maybe he—he didn't—he didn't show—maybe he didn't demand that he be taught anything. So, you know, you talk about what kind of other ways did—did—my mother made all our clothes. I don't know when she would—after—the whole family would go to sleep. Two, three o'clock in the morning she made our little panties. She made our little dresses. I will show you some pictures.

LEVINE: Okay. Let me sign off.

ZIMMERMAN: Okay, let me see if there's anything else I jotted down that I [tape off/on]—[unclear] that everybody had boarders.

LEVINE: Did you have boarders that you—

ZIMMERMAN: No, my father was—my father was a boarder those three and a half years that we were not here.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: They had—people didn't have a living room. They had a dining room. And if they would take the two armchairs and put them, you know, facing each other with another chair in between, it made like a bed. And you'd just put quilts—a couple of layers of quilts on that and you—and a person could sleep there. And that's how—you know, when they—they would bring over brothers and sisters and more brothers and sisters, this is how they all lived. Everybody brought over somebody. They had no bed for him. They had no room for him but they would sleep on chairs that they pulled together like that, usually two armchairs with another chair, you know, in between that would make it long enough. You know? Do

you understand? Do you get the picture? Either that or they would sleep on the floor.

LEVINE: And this would be in what might have been the living room?

ZIMMERMAN: It was in any room wherever there was room, even in the kitchen.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZIMMERMAN: Even in a hallway, wherever there was—wherever there was a spot on the floor, somebody had a boarder. First of all, they needed the money that the boarder could bring in. You know, the 50 cents or so a week that he—that he might be able to pay and for his meals and, you know, whatever. And usually, it was—usually, the boarder didn't even have to be a stranger. He could be your nephew or your brother-in-law, somebody who was—who had come here and was working hard and saving every penny so he could send for the next brother or the next sister.

LEVINE: And they would all—it was typical that they would all eat together in [unclear].

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, yes. Oh, yes, yes. But everybody—everybody had—that's how the boarders got here. And they—everybody sent for the next one and sent for the next one. And that's how we all got here. And everybody made—they all made their way. They all made their way.

LEVINE: I never heard of a woman boarder. Have you ever heard of a woman boarder?

ZIMMERMAN: Well, there had to be. Surely. Of course.

LEVINE: [several words unclear] home.

ZIMMERMAN: Sometimes they would—yes, they would send—they would send—a brother would send for his sister. And she would be his boarder or she might be—they might both be living with an aunt. She would be the boarder. But everybody had boarders. It was a—it worked both ways. It was a two-way street. The one who had the boarder had—had the extra pennies that she could—you know, that she collected and the boarder had a place to live while he was saving up money to send a ticket for the next person.

LEVINE: So in—in the five-story apartment building that you first moved to, you would say that a majority of those people had boarders?

ZIMMERMAN: Oh, surely. Oh, surely. Everybody had boarders because everybody had family that they would—the boarders were not necessarily strangers, although we’ve—we’ve had some strangers too. I mean, my mother had to take in strangers as boarders. Strangers and we didn’t even know who they—who they were. They could have slit our throats at night but—but—but—but they paid the board and it helped—it helped to send us through school and helped to pay the bills. It was a—I don’t think anybody was poorer than we were. You know, when they talk about people being poor today, nobody’s as poor as that because they have—everybody gets welfare of some kind. Somebody pays their rent, whatever it is. Nobody paid our rent. There was nobody who would give us—nobody to borrow money from that had it to give. And if—and we wouldn’t take it because there’d be no way to give it back. And it was a common sight to see people dispossessed. Did you ever hear of that?

LEVINE: Yes, I have. But talk about it.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, it was a common sight. This was my greatest fear as a child, being dispossessed, because it was very often, if you couldn’t pay your rent the landlord dispossessed you. And you’d come home from school and there was this family next door had all their belongings on the sidewalk. Everything they owned in this life was spread out on the sidewalk.

LEVINE: Was it a—was it a great source of—

ZIMMERMAN: It was a common—it was a common thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I mean, were people absolutely ashamed, I mean, or—

ZIMMERMAN: They were—

LEVINE: —was it so common that it [chuckles]—that it—

ZIMMERMAN: Well, of course they were. The shame wasn’t—wasn’t their—wasn’t their first emotion. Their first emotion was, “Where am I going to go?” And they all had large families. “Where are we going to go?” Eventually, [unclear] they all went someplace after two, three days and it would rain on the furniture. And then people would—[unclear] get scuffed around the sidewalk, get thrown around, scuffed around. But—but somehow or other, they would go someplace eventually. And this was—this was my greatest fear when I was growing up, that someday our belongings would be on

the sidewalk in, you know, one of those—if my mother weren't—if my mother weren't what she was—I remember we had—we had no sheets. We had no sheets. At one point we were very low. There was a store that had been a dry goods store, fabric—a fabric store. And they—they went out of business or left or something. And they had a lot of these swatches of fabric. You know, like this size squares—squares of all kinds of fabric. And they were usually chained together, all that were the same pattern but in different colors. You know, whole—whole heaps of them. My mother brought up a whole big bag of these—these swatches. They couldn't have been—some of them weren't even the size of the page of this book. I sat there and I sewed those together on the sewing machine and I made a sheet. I made pillowcases out of these—these—these—these bits of fabric. It took a lot of—a lot of patience and a lot of sewing but I did it. So we had a sheet; we had pillowcases seamed up from all these little—little squares. I remember I had a—at one point I had this job at Hernes [PH] Department Store on a Saturday and I used to get \$2. And one of the first things I did—I needed that \$2 for, you know, more important things but I bought a doll for my sister, Ruth, one day. The doll department was having a sale and I bought her a doll. It was the first real doll she had. We had given her rag dolls that we used to put together. She had a real doll. And then—I don't know if you've ever heard of Eva Legalian [PH]. She was a old actress but an actress of the first order. Eva Legalian, played in “Peter Pan.” In the 14<sup>th</sup>—on 14<sup>th</sup> Street west of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, I believe, there was what they called the Civic Repertory Theater. And Eva Legalian played in “Peter Pan.” It was a stage production. And my little sisters had never seen a stage production. And I got tickets for them and I took them to see—I think I took three or four of them. I got tickets for them out of that—that—they talk about it to this day. My sister, Ruth, talks about that doll to this day and—and the others still talk about seeing “Peter Pan” on the stage.

[END OF INTERVIEW]