

EI-845RODWIN

MINNIE RODWIN

BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 9, 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 90

RUNNING TIME: 27:12

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: HELEN HENWOOD

ENGLAND, 1910

AGE: 3

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PORT:

RESIDENCES:

- **ENGLAND, LONDON, COMMERCIAL ROAD**
- **U.S, NEW YORK, LOWER EAST SIDE, 141 ESSEX STREET, ROCKAWAY BEACH, SUNRISE FLORIDA.**

LEVINE: Today—today is February the—the 12th and I'm here in Sunrise, Florida at the home of Minnie Rodwin. Minnie came from England in 1910 when she was three and a half years of age.

RODWIN: I—at that time I was Mary.

LEVINE: You were Mary Floun . Mary Floun, her—that was her maiden name.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And that was her name when she came to this country.

RODWIN: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. And let's see. At the time of this—of this interview you're 90 years of age. You just had a birthday.

RODWIN: Right.

LEVINE: (chuckles) Okay, so you're 90 years old. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would state for the tape again your birth date and where you were born.

RODWIN: My—the regular [unclear]?

LEVINE: What you—whatever birth date. You—you have two, right? When you were born and when you were registered.

RODWIN: December—December 25th.

LEVINE: Was that when you were actually born?

RODWIN: Yeah, six o'clock in the morning. My—my—my—my mother used to say the—the times [unclear].

LEVINE: Really? And what else did your mother tell you about when you were born?

RODWIN: Well, my mother was—business. She's—bakery business.

LEVINE: In London?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So you were really born on Christmas—

RODWIN: Morning.

LEVINE: —morning. And—but you were registered and so your official birth date is February 9th, 1907.

RODWIN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, you were only three and a half when you came to this country. But what recollections do you have of England?

RODWIN: Well, first of all, we—we—we—we—we had—they were building—the building they had built—and they were building houses. So there was a lady right—right—right opposite us. She was Irish. And she used to call me

“Mary, Mary.” So I said, “What do you want?” “I just want to tell you not to make so—so—noise.” I [unclear] I was quiet.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

RODWIN: But—

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in in London?

RODWIN: I have the birth—birth certif—

LEVINE: Certificate. Uh-huh, uh-huh. But do you remember the house? Do you remember anything in particular that you could describe?

RODWIN: Well, I know we had—we had a—oh, what do you call it? Where none—lo—lot of people didn’t have. We had—outside, we had a—an icebox with ice. And we used to keep our cold things in there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And a lot of people didn’t have an icebox at that time.

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And is there anything else you can think of that you recall? Do you recall your mo—where your mother had the bakery?

RODWIN: Yeah, in Commercial Road.

LEVINE: Wow! Uh-huh. Did you go to the bakery? Could you say anything about—

RODWIN: Yeah. We lived—we lived up where—where the bakery was.

LEVINE: I see. And what was your mother’s name?

RODWIN: Sophie.

LEVINE: Sophie. And her maiden name, do you know that?

RODWIN: It’s a funny name. Vivyeika. That means, oh, a squirrel.

LEVINE: Oh. (chuckles) Uh-huh. And could you spell it?

RODWIN: Vivyeika—V-I-V-Y-E-I-K-A.

LEVINE: Was your mother born in England?

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: Where was she born?

RODWIN: [unclear], Warsaw.

LEVINE: Oh, Warsaw. Uh-huh. So do you know when she came to England? Do you know—had she been—

RODWIN: When we—when we were born.

LEVINE: Well, I mean, had she been living—she had a bakery there so she must have been there for a while before you were born.

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: No?

RODWIN: When—er--my father was married and he was in—what do you call it's—

LEVINE: The military?

RODWIN: No—yeah.

LEVINE: In the—in the army.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: But he wasn't [unclear]. He was in—see, I forget all this.

LEVINE: That's okay. Whatever you remember you can say.

RODWIN: Ah—

LEVINE: Was—was he in Warsaw?

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: No.

RODWIN: In—I forget. I—I knew all these things but the—

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, in other words, when he was in the army is when he met your mother.

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: No.

RODWIN: They lived together—they lived in the same town.

LEVINE: Oh, so he also came from Poland?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Your father?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, his last name was Floun?

RODWIN: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So—so they had met in Poland.

RODWIN: Right.

LEVINE: And they married and came to England?

RODWIN: Well, he went to—they sent him some—I forget the name. Anyway, he was there sometime. My mother was married and her husband died.

LEVINE: Oh.

RODWIN: So when he come back he married my mother.

LEVINE: I see.

RODWIN: And he had a mother-in-law that was very—she wasn't very nice. So she—

LEVINE: This is your mother's mother?

RODWIN: My mother's mother—m—m—m—m—my mother's mother-in-law.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

RODWIN: So she—she—she always used to talk about—she said that's why her son died, because my mother was waiting for a—him to come back.

LEVINE: Oh.

RODWIN: Anyway, they got married but she was always after her. So she—she got a [unclear] so crazy that she went to L—London.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. I see.

RODWIN: She went to London and then they opened up another bakery.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: That's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

RODWIN: Yeah, we were nine.

LEVINE: In England?

RODWIN: No—yeah. We had two sisters in Poland—

LEVINE: Oh, that were born in Poland.

RODWIN: —[unclear]—were born there. My grandmother—that's [unclear].

LEVINE: Wow.

RODWIN: My [unclear] grandmother. She—she—she—no, no. She was very good.

LEVINE: You remember her?

RODWIN: No, just from—

LEVINE: No.

RODWIN: Just from pictures.

LEVINE: Right, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

RODWIN: She was in London but I was too—I wasn't even born. So—er--anyway, we had two sisters in Poland we left there—

LEVINE: Oh.

RODWIN: —because my mother was afraid she wouldn't be—be able to take care of them.

LEVINE: So the two sisters were left with your grandmother?

RODWIN: Yeah, just till one was seven years old.

LEVINE: So then who went to London? Your mother—

RODWIN: My father.

LEVINE: —and your father. Just the two of them?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then you were born in London. And were other children born in London too?

RODWIN: Yeah, all—all the rest of them.

LEVINE: I see. So you must have been among the youngest.

RODWIN: Yeah, next to the youngest.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea of when your mother came to London? When she left Poland and went to London?

RODWIN: When my—my—I have two brothers that were twins. And—er--wh—she was pregnant with them when she went to London.

LEVINE: I see. And then after the two twins—the two twin brothers, who comes next in the—in the line of children?

RODWIN: It's a—a—a daughter.

LEVINE: Okay.

RODWIN: Esther.

LEVINE: Esther. And then who?

RODWIN: Esther—Jackie.

LEVINE: Jackie's a girl or boy?

RODWIN: No, boy.

LEVINE: A boy, uh-huh. Jackie, and then?

RODWIN: Annie.

LEVINE: Annie.

RODWIN: Me.

LEVINE: Okay, Mary.

RODWIN: And then kid sister, Yettie.

LEVINE: Yettie.

RODWIN: She died.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RODWIN: She was two years younger than me. That's all.

LEVINE: So was Yettie born—Yettie was born in London and Yettie came to the United States—

RODWIN: With us.

LEVINE: With you. Uh-huh, okay. So what—let's see. What was your father's first name?

RODWIN: Morris.

LEVINE: Morris, okay. And so your mother had the bakery business. And did your fath—was your father part of that bakery business in London?

RODWIN: Oh, he was—yeah.

LEVINE: That was his business, uh-huh. I see. Did—did anybody ever tell you why your mother and father decided to come to the United States?

RODWIN: Well, my father was called in—into—back to the army when the boys were just—just thirteen, the twins.

LEVINE: The Polish Army?

RODWIN: No—yeah. No.

LEVINE: In England? In—in—

RODWIN: It wasn't England. It was—I forget the name of it.

LEVINE: Maybe it was the Russian Army.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Because those borders changed a lot.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

RODWIN: This is the Russian Army. It was underground. I don't know what the—and anyway, that's where—

LEVINE: He was called back into the army. And so, instead, the family moved to the United States.

RODWIN: So my father got tickets, went to the United States. He had some relatives in the—in New--New York.

LEVINE: So he went first.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then—

RODWIN: The year before.

LEVINE: The year before. And what did he do when he got to the United States for work? Do you know?

RODWIN: He opened up a bakery.

LEVINE: A bakery. I see. (telephone rings)

RODWIN: All right. I get it.

LEVINE: Okay, we'll just turn this off. [tape off/on] Resume here after a telephone call from Minnie's daughter. Okay, why don't we say—so the reason was to avoid going back in the army. That was the reason that your father left first.

RODWIN: That's right.

LEVINE: And he opened a bakery in New York? Was it in New York?

RODWIN: Downtown.

LEVINE: Downtown in Manhattan?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then in a year or so he sent for the children.

RODWIN: He had the tickets, yeah.

LEVINE: He—okay. And when you left, you left with your mother and all of your brothers and sisters. Do you remember anything about the journey?

RODWIN: We—we had—we were in—in—in—in a Jewish—

LEVINE: Section of London? Uh-huh.

RODWIN: And the—er--the—er-- chef knew us from London.

LEVINE: Oh. You were in the Jewish section on the ship?

RODWIN: On the ship, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow, I never h—have heard that before.

RODWIN: Yeah. So they had, um--like, you know—

LEVINE: Bunk beds?

RODWIN: Bunk beds. And I was on the top [unclear]. Anyway, I—I wanted to go to the bathroom so I just went in—I went into the—into the water. And th—the—the lady took me—took me and took—took all my things off. And she changed me. And then she gave me something and put me back [unclear].

LEVINE: Now, were you in steerage? Were you in the bottom of the ship with a lot of people all around?

RODWIN: Oh, we were in the bottom. And we used to dance and—

LEVINE: Used to dance?

RODWIN: Oh, yes. We used to dance and sing and they used to throw money down.

LEVINE: Really?

RODWIN: But we couldn't put—we couldn't put—put—put it up. My mother wouldn't let—let us.

LEVINE: Oh. You mean—you mean your sisters and brothers—you would dance and sing and people would throw money, but your mother wouldn't let you take it. Uh-huh.

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: And this was in steerage—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that you did that. Uh-huh.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you said that the name of the ship—

RODWIN: The Philadelphia.

LEVINE: The Philadelphia. And do you remember anything else about the voyage?

RODWIN: They were very nice. This--er--this chef used to send us up all kind of kosher things we could eat, like pickle herring or the—the—the—the things that we—we could eat.

LEVINE: Well, now, did the chef send these things—did you go up to a dining area where there were tables? Do you remember that?

RODWIN: I can't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But anyway, your mother kept a kosher house? So on the ship—

RODWIN: Oh, yeah. Still—

LEVINE: You still do, uh-huh.

RODWIN: It's still ko—kosher.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

RODWIN: September.

LEVINE: Do you remember, maybe, seeing the Statue of Liberty?

RODWIN: Oh, yes. We all ran to see the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Of course, you probably didn't know what it was—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —because you were so young. And how about—do you remember your father meeting the family?

RODWIN: The other father?

LEVINE: Your father. Do you remember when you got to America?

RODWIN: Oh, we had lots of—lots of rel—la—

LEVINE: Relatives.

RODWIN: Relatives.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and where were your relatives? Were they all in New York?

RODWIN: One was on Forty second Street. One was in the Bronx. They were all over.

LEVINE: Now, were these brothers and sisters of your mother and father, these relatives?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So do you remember seeing your father? Because you probably didn't even remember him.

RODWIN: Oh, I did.

LEVINE: Oh, you did remember him? Uh-huh.

RODWIN: Daddy [unclear]. At that time, they used to call your father Papa. We called him Daddy because in London it was Daddy. So that's—that's all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember where the family went when they left—when they got off the boat?

RODWIN: We went to the Lower East Side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And before that, do you remember Ellis Island at all?

RODWIN: No.

LEVINE: Okay. And [unclear]—

RODWIN: All—all the people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And the Lower East Side. Do you remember any impressions you have from what—you know, when you were there for the first time?

RODWIN: We—we had horses—horses used to ride around. We had [unclear].

LEVINE: Like a horse and wagon, you mean?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: We had the—couple wagons because we had to del—deliver.

LEVINE: You had to deliver the bakery goods.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, it tur—it's—your father must have been a baker. Was he a baker in Poland?

RODWIN: My father was not—my father was not a baker.

LEVINE: Oh.

RODWIN: He was a—a—a tailor.

LEVINE: Oh, your father was a tailor?

RODWIN: My mother was the b—the baker.

LEVINE: Okay.

RODWIN: Through my mother, they—they became—yeah, my father became a what do you call it?

LEVINE: A tailor?

RODWIN: No, a baker.

LEVINE: Oh, he became a baker from your mother?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Now, had your mother been a baker in Poland before she ever got to—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —London?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So they opened a bakery in the Lower East Side? Uh-huh. And do you remember where you lived in the Lower East Side?

RODWIN: We lived—141 Essex Street.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. You remember the building?

RODWIN: It's a four—four-story—

LEVINE: A walkup.

RODWIN: —walkup.

LEVINE: Like a tenement?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have a—a bathroom inside?

RODWIN: Three—three—three—

LEVINE: Between apartments?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: They were in the hall.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. And how about—do—did you have the gas meters in the apartment—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that you had to put a quarter in?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything else about that place? Essex Street, where you lived?

RODWIN: Well, the bakery was across the street. We could—we could—we—we [unclear] bakery there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RODWIN: We had a nice time.

LEVINE: Hmm. And so some of your—some of your brothers and sisters must have started school then right away?

RODWIN: Yeah—no. My brothers were fourteen years old.

LEVINE: Oh, so they didn't go back to—they didn't go to school?

RODWIN: They went—they—yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, they did?

RODWIN: They went but the—they didn't take them because we had—my mother came with all her kids. And they says, "Let them stay home and help you."

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So none of you had to go to school then?

RODWIN: Oh, we all went.

LEVINE: Oh, you all went. Do you remember starting school?

RODWIN: Yeah, I started in the [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And was—how was school for you?

RODWIN: All right. I was [unclear]—of course, in—in London, they—they started you at school at three—three o'clock—three—

LEVINE: Three years old?

RODWIN: Three years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. So you had already been to school.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. So you knew a lot of things—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —before you started.

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. Okay. Can you—can you talk a little bit about the Lower East Side in those days?

RODWIN: Well—

LEVINE: What it was like?

RODWIN: I have to eat.

LEVINE: Oh, you have to eat? (chuckles) Okay. Okay. Let me just ask you a few last questions. Okay? What did you do then? Did you do some kind of work in your life or did you—

RODWIN: I helped my mother—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: —my father in the bakery.

LEVINE: In the bakery I see.

RODWIN: Came to holidays, we used to you put almonds and cherries on the macaroons. Yeah, we—we helped out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then how did you meet your husband?

RODWIN: He was a—he used to drive a—a—a—a what do you call it? He worked in a bakery too. He drove a—a—a—you know, it's hard for me to—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was it a delivery—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —truck?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then how many children did you have?

RODWIN: Me?

LEVINE: Yeah.

RODWIN: I had six.

LEVINE: You had six children and your—and what was your husband's name?

RODWIN: Mom—Mor—Jack.

LEVINE: Jack, uh-huh. And when you look back on it now, how you and your brothers and sisters and mother and father came and settled in the Lower East Side and everything, do you think that made a big difference in your life, the kind of person you were and—

RODWIN: Well, we were al—we were always together. Always together. So, you know, it—it was a nice—

LEVINE: Did you stay in the Lower East Side or did the family move on to someplace else?

RODWIN: We moved to—oh, we—we were in Rockaway Beach.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And did you have a bakery there too?

RODWIN: Yeah, we had—we had a bakery there.

LEVINE: Wow. You don't, by any chance, remember the name of the bakery that you had in the Lower—

RODWIN: Floun's. Oh, Floun's.

LEVINE: —Lower East Side.

RODWIN: Floun's.

LEVINE: So that—that was your maiden name. Floun's Bakery—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —it was called. And the bakery was also on Essex Street?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Across the street from where you lived? Uh-huh. Do you remember the years, roughly, that—that—that you had the bakery there?

RODWIN: Well, I must have been about four or five.

LEVINE: So, say, 1911?

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you keep it for many years or—

RODWIN: No, not many years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: Oh, we were—we were on the East Side about fifteen years.

LEVINE: Fifteen? Oh, uh-huh.

RODWIN: Then we moved to Rockaway Beach.

LEVINE: Rockaway Beach, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

RODWIN: Well, that's—

LEVINE: Okay, is there anything else you can think of that you might want to add about coming to this country or what it's meant to you to be in this country or anything?

RODWIN: It was nice. Relatives were very nice. Oh, they used to come [unclear]—Friday, they'd come to my—my father's bakery. And they'd—they'd take—they would have the [unclear] they were going to take. They were all right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So—so did you have get-togethers then with your relatives—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —once you got to this country?

RODWIN: Oh, they were al—always my house.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How did your mother feel about coming to this country?

RODWIN: She didn't mind as long—as long as my father went, she wanted to come too.

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LEVINE: She wanted to be with him, uh-huh. And was he happy in this country, your fath—

RODWIN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. And then did you visit Ellis Island?

RODWIN: I think I was there when I—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RODWIN: Can't remember.

LEVINE: Okay. And how are things for you now? Now that you're ninety years old and you're—

RODWIN: It's all right.

LEVINE: Okay? Uh-huh. I see you have a daughter nearby.

RODWIN: Oh, I have—oh, my—I have a daughter near L.A. and a daughter in Atlanta. I have grandchildren. Here, I'll show you.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let me turn this off first. I want to thank you. I'm going to take your microphone off. I've been speaking with Minnie Rodman, who came from England in 1910 when she was three and a half years old.

RODWIN: Yeah, September.

LEVINE: And the family had originally come from the Poland, Russian border—

RODWIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —and settled in the Lower East Side. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]