

**EI-849**

**ZENA KARP SHAPIRO**

**BIRTHDATE: APRIL 22, 1902**

**INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 94**

**RUNNING TIME: 1:01:01**

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

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**RUSSIA, 1922**

**AGE: 20**

**SHIP: THE LITHUANIA**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: Okay, today is, I believe, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 19973

SHAPIRO: Today is the 19<sup>th</sup>.

LEVINE: The 19<sup>th</sup>. Okay, you're right. See how sharp you are? You caught [chuckles] me on a—well, one thing already, a fact. Okay, February 19<sup>th</sup>—

SHAPIRO: Sharp.

LEVINE: —1997. I'm here in Century Village in West Palm Beach, Florida with Zena Shapiro.

SHAPIRO: That's my marriage name.

LEVINE: That's your married name, right. And Zena came from Russia when she was 20 years old in 1922. Today, at the time of the interview, you're 95 years old. And with us also here is Laura Himan [PH], who is

EI-849/SHAPIRO

Zena's daughter. And I'm Janet Levine and I'm interviewing for the National Park Service. Okay, your birth date—

SHAPIRO: April—

LEVINE: April 22<sup>nd</sup>—

SHAPIRO: Yes.

LEVINE: —1902. 1902, and you were born in Russia. Where in Russian were you? Where were you?

SHAPIRO: Ukraine.

LEVINE: Ukraine?

SHAPIRO: Ukraine.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, do you remember—

SHAPIRO: Kharkov [PH].

LEVINE: Say it again.

SHAPIRO: Kharkov.

LEVINE: Now, did you live in the same place the whole time before you left for America?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: Where did you live?

SHAPIRO: We lived in—you see, I'm getting a little woozy. [chuckles] I lived in Russia, of course, if you want to know this, when and where did I live.

LEVINE: Did you live in the same town up until you left? Did you—or did you move when you were young?

SHAPIRO: No. I had to—I sell it to—we sell it to move when we supposed to take the boat.

LEVINE: Right. But before that, you were always in the same place.

SHAPIRO: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now—

SHAPIRO: In Kharkov.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

SHAPIRO: Leahe. [PH]

LEVINE: Leahe. And do you remember her maiden name?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: Okay, well, we're going to have a genealogy on—on file. So we'll have that that your daughter is going to—

SHAPIRO: Leahe.

LEVINE: —copy for us.

SHAPIRO: Okay. And your father's name?

LEVINE: Hashe.

SHAPIRO: Hashe.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters? When you were born, were there other children in the family?

SHAPIRO: No, I was the first.

LEVINE: You were the first.

SHAPIRO: Then I had a brother and then I had another brother.

LEVINE: Another brother. Okay. And when you were little, when you were growing up, was your family religious?

HIMAN: Not particularly.

SHAPIRO: No. You know, when it's a big holiday like, that you fast. My mother and father did, you know. Elderly—they were elderly and they did it.

LEVINE: Did you have a kosher home?

SHAPIRO: [chuckles] Who remembers?

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay. All right. Tell me what you do remember. What do you remember from when you were a little girl?

SHAPIRO: I remember that when I was about five years old and we were living in a—we had to go down five, six steps—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: —like, in the cellar—that was in Russia. And in the morning I used to have breakfast and go up five steps and sit down and I was singing the Russian songs.

LEVINE: Really?

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: In Russian?

SHAPIRO: In Russian, yeah. That's all I knew.

LEVINE: So what—

SHAPIRO: That's all I knew.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of those songs?

SHAPIRO: Oh, about—no, I can't remember. Maybe we don't want to say more than—than that.

LEVINE: You can't sing a few lines from what you remember?

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

SHAPIRO: I remember [speaking in foreign language]. That means, "I was sitting on the steps and it was a mar—a [unclear] day; it was raining all day." That's in Russian.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: That's all. That's what I was saying.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: "Another day like today before [unclear] sunshine."

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And, okay, so you said you had breakfast and then you'd go on the steps. What would you have for breakfast?

SHAPIRO: Oh, who can remember? [unclear] [laughs] I used to be crazy about vinegar.

LEVINE: You used to be crazy about vinegar?

SHAPIRO: Oh, my mother didn't want I should drink it. But she used to steal the bottle with the vinegar someplace. And I saw once where she put it and I used to steal vinegar. I used to drink, not too much, but I used to drink a sip. I loved vinegar because of sour.

LEVINE: Huh. What do you remember about the food you had in Russia?

SHAPIRO: My mother used to cook.

LEVINE: What were your favorite things besides vinegar?

SHAPIRO: Soups.

LEVINE: Soups.

SHAPIRO: Soup, meat. Who can [several words unclear]?

LEVINE: What would—what was your father doing for work when you were in the Ukraine? What did your father do?

SHAPIRO: He—he had a store.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: And he used to fix fee—shoes. You know, fix shoes, put on heels and, you know. And he opened up his own—he didn't open—we lived downstairs. Everybody [unclear] they used to put us up—down—downstairs steps.

LEVINE: And the store was above?

SHAPIRO: And the store was above the work, you know. What do you call it? [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Now, were you living in an area where there were all Jews?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: Was it mixed?

SHAPIRO: I'll tell you. At that time, I really don't remember being Jewish. [laughs]

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

SHAPIRO: Yeah, although my father took from the Hebrew place—they found out my father's name and they gave him an order for the Hebrew kids to make shoes for the winter, boots, [unclear]. There was a lot of snow, wintertime, cold, and they used to go to school. He used to make them. [unclear].

LEVINE: Did you go—did you go to school?

SHAPIRO: Well, yeah. Sure, together. I didn't bring my—I [unclear] school—

LEVINE: Oh, you finished—

SHAPIRO: At [unclear], yeah. And I got a—how can I say it? And a—

LEVINE: Diploma?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, a diploma.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How—

SHAPIRO: And—

LEVINE: How long did you go?

SHAPIRO: Up to—I must have been about 15—I think so; I'm not sure. About that, yeah.

LEVINE: What kind of a school was it? What do you remember about the school?

SHAPIRO: Well, Russian schools, you know, write and read and—and, oh, that was—we used to be afraid for the teachers, you know.

LEVINE: What would they do?

SHAPIRO: They wouldn't do nothing but they angry if you don't listen and if—you know, the kids so—so afraid—the kids were so afraid for the teachers there. This I remember.

LEVINE: Now, you were speaking Russian in school.

SHAPIRO: That's all I did.

LEVINE: And at home too?

SHAPIRO: That's all I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, all Russian.

LEVINE: Now, what—what do you remember doing for fun when you were little?

SHAPIRO: I used to go—I used to be on the market selling; I was about 15 years old selling potatoes, bread, you know, all under [unclear]. And the—I get mixed up. What did you ask me?

LEVINE: Where did you—what did you do for fun?

SHAPIRO: After I—after working in the market there selling, I used to come home, wash up, change and I used to go to dances because there was already the war on. 1914, I think—yeah, the war on so there was a lot of soldiers in our—in our city, a lot of—so—so they used to have dances, you know. So I washed up and cleaned up and I had a— [laughs] this is unbelievable. I wanted a little bit of rouge. So who has rouge there? They didn't know about it. So I used to take [unclear] beets and cut up a beet a half. I remember I was about 15 already. And I used to make a little bit red here. And what did I put on—I looked good [laughs] for the soldiers to dance.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: And I used to go to a dance with a friend of mine, other girl. And the soldiers took us out dancing. And then I had to come home about 10, 11 and go to bed and—[chuckles] to bed. There was a—and we had no beds, you know. The little ones had beds. I was an old lady already, 15, so, you know, [unclear], two chairs and—and—and what do you call them?

LEVINE: Blanket?

SHAPIRO: No, no.

LEVINE: Ah—

SHAPIRO: Something like this too.

LEVINE: Board?

SHAPIRO: Under—a board and then another had—that we used to cover with, blankets, you know—put on the board and another blanket on me. And that's how I slept. And after dancing about a couple o hours I was dead. [laughs] Oh, God. This is coming to me little.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Then we left the city where we were and we had to go to America.

LEVINE: Well, first, your father left first, right?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, my father left. He must have been here about—I don't remember how long he was here with all us. But the war broke out. What year was it?

LEVINE: [clears throat] Well, your father—well, your father came to America eight years before you did, and you came in 1922.

SHAPIRO: To America.

LEVINE: Right.

SHAPIRO: But when—when did, though, my fa—come my father here?

LEVINE: He must have come during World War I.

HIMAN: 1914. He left in the early time before the war started, beginning of the year.

LEVINE: Okay, so—

HIMAN: He came—

LEVINE: Laura says in 1914, just before the war started your father—

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. What was life like for you and your family once your father left? How did you get along?

SHAPIRO: That's how we got along. My mother used to bake bread.

LEVINE: Where did she bake it?

SHAPIRO: In the house. We had an oven.

LEVINE: What was the oven like?

SHAPIRO: Huh?

LEVINE: What—you remember the oven?

SHAPIRO: It's an oven where you baked bread, you know.

LEVINE: Made out of—out of what? Stone? No?

SHAPIRO: The oven, yeah. Of course. It was in the house, like right here an oven, you know. And she made bread. She made—kneaded the bread and she put it in the oven. And she baked it; then she took out the bread and she—and she cool it and she cut it to [unclear], like. And I used to put it on my back and I used to go to the market to sell it, piece like this. So besides the bread, I used to—what did I have to [unclear]. So I took oil that you fry on—cans I used to buy. And at one time I used to wake up. [chuckles] This is unbelievable. Now that I'm coming to it, it's really unbelievable. I must have been about 15, 16. I used to go four o'clock in the morning to a market, buy a can of oil that you fry on, you know, because we used to fry potatoes. And—and the—the peasants used to come in and sell the oil in cans. So I was there early in the morning in early—and looked over. So one guy came over to me, said, "[unclear], what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm buying oil. I'm going to sell in the—on the market." "I got oil I'll give you." So I said, "Okay." So how do you—I—I was taught that to know if the oil is good, and a can of oil is about 20, 30 pounds, you know. So he used to open up the little head from the oil can. And I used to—he said, "Here." He used to put in to see that it's not water he's selling because oil is, you know [unclear]. You know, oil is not water so it—so, fine. And I bought it. He gave me a good buy and I took it on my shoulders and I walked home to get a pail and to get a—a—a what do you call it? A measurement.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: Like a quarter of a glass or a quarter of something. This I remember. And you know, I started to—to see selling. And I saw it again, was 10 pounds oil and 20 pounds water, because when you put your finger in you can't put—that's all you can put in, the finger. You can't put [unclear]. So I used to put a—I, the kid—my mother wasn't—she was—you know, she never did nothing. So I saw that. "Oh," I said. "My mother going to kill me." She's going to find out; she's going to absolutely kill me. Look what I bought and so much money." Yeah, she gave me hell, you know. But I lost—we lost the money because the water was in the oil, more water than oil.

LEVINE: Hmm. So you couldn't sell it?

SHAPIRO: So you can't sell the water.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SHAPIRO: The oil, they buy—they bought. I had a little quar—quar—a—a—a [unclear] or a—

LEVINE: Cup?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, and that's a measurement I used to have. You know, I was talking—a woman came over and needed and I put—and I saw water already. I was selling, selling and I saw water. Oh, I was afraid to come home. My mother'll kill me. Ah! It's coming, coming slowly to me. Ooh, what I went through! Because I was the oldest.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember anything else about your mother? Any experiences you had, what you did, maybe places you went with her or things that happened—

SHAPIRO: Hmm, no.

LEVINE: —when you were little?

SHAPIRO: She had friends.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: Every Saturday night they used to get together and—and they had tea, you know, the friends, couples. That's the only time that they're [unclear], Saturday night. It's impossible exactly to—to—to remember. It's impossible, impossible. My brothers were—my brother that's going to come soon, he's about—what—how old is Morris, Laura?

HIMAN: He's three years younger than you.

SHAPIRO: Oh. And Arthur?

HIMAN: He's 10 years younger than you.

SHAPIRO: That's how she—when—when she went away—when my father went away, my mother was pregnant [chuckles] with the third one. Oh, it's impossible. It's impossible. It's unbelievable, unbelievable. So I remember [chuckles] Arthur. His name is Arthur. He was supposed to be here and he didn't come.

LEVINE: Now, did you take care of your brothers, being the oldest?

SHAPIRO: Of course. I used to diaper the baby. Already, I was about what? When he was born I must have been about 16 years old. I think [unclear]. I don't remember. And the war broke out and I went—I went to the market to see the soldiers that were taking the war—the 1914 war.

LEVINE: The ones that were going into the army, you mean?

SHAPIRO: What?

LEVINE: The soldiers that—

SHAPIRO: Right away, they started to [unclear] on the—you know, on the [unclear] the boys, 16, 17, 18 to come to this place, because they have to go to army.

LEVINE: Do you have any memories of the war besides that?

SHAPIRO: We had nothing to eat. [chuckles] That's the memory. Very little to eat, yeah.

LEVINE: So how did you get along? How did you—

SHAPIRO: Somehow. Somehow I just—I think it's a little bit too much now to remember all these things. It's impossible. It's impossible. I remember we already had the letter from my father that we can go to America. We should go to Moscow. In Moscow we'll get tickets on the—for the boat. And I came to the—I took them and we went to Moscow from Kharkov. That's where we were. And I remember—what did I want to come to? So if I would remember everything, this could take—could have taken me months and months and months, one to one.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: What did I want to bring out? Oh, yeah. So we came. We took our [unclear]. I took my brother and we went to Moscow from one city to the other. From Moscow, we could have take the boat to go to America.

LEVINE: What—how did you get to Moscow?

SHAPIRO: By train.

LEVINE: By train.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, by train. So we got to Moscow and I went—I was the [unclear], the talker. So I went to Moscow and I went to—we—we didn't have nothing to eat. They gave us a place to stay until we get the [unclear] to be able to go to—on the boat. This is a—the saddest thing I had. I was the one that had the—the [unclear]. I mean, I was the—the [unclear]—my mother didn't know nothing. My brother went selling cigarettes. He made a buck and [unclear]. A cigarette's a penny, a penny a cigarette.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: My brother.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: The one after me. Yeah, but this is the main part. So I went—somebody told me to go to the temple and talk to a rabbi that we came, we have nothing and we need to eat. And so they showed me how to get to the temple in Moscow already. We got by train. And the rabbi says, "Wh—where are—where were you? Where are you?" I told him we [unclear]—we staying someplace. They gave us a place to stay. We slept on the floor but we couldn't go that day. We had to have a week to stay in Moscow to go on the boat, on the—yeah, but the name—oh.

LEVINE: So you went to the rabbi.

SHAPIRO: I walked to the rabbi and I started to talk—I saw—I saw he was crying, coming—the tears were coming down. I was 14 and here I'm pleading with him, "Doctor, we—we—here we have nothing to eat." He was—he said, "Never mind. Forget about it. I'll give you [unclear] eat. I'll give you [unclear]." And he went in the kitchen. I remember he gave something in one—meat and soup. "And every Friday, if you're going

to be through here in Moscow and waiting for the boat, come to me to the temple and I'll give you eat. I'll give you [unclear] and I'll give you everything." This I remember well and I used to ran and waited till—oh, that's why they came. It was our holiday. He gave chicken and he gave soup and I was the [unclear]. My brother and I, we schlepped it [unclear].

LEVINE: So you stayed in—for several Fridays?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: You were staying in Moscow?

SHAPIRO: I—we stayed there for about three Fridays, three weeks until I went there and he said, "Now, I've got your passes. We can—you can board the—what do you call it? The ship.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: A ship [several words unclear] nothing.

LEVINE: The ship was the Lithuania?

SHAPIRO: I think so. I'm not so sure but I think so. What've you got there? Do you have something?

LEVINE: [sentence unclear].

SHAPIRO: What—what?

LEVINE: But this came from you. It's—it's not—

SHAPIRO: Now?

LEVINE: —something from Ellis Island.

SHAPIRO: Now?

LEVINE: No, you—a long time ago. Probably Laura helped you to fill it in.

SHAPIRO: When [unclear] was once with me?

HIMAN: No—

LEVINE: No, no. No, but in other words, in order for me to know that you were here so I could come and interview you, Laura sent in—

SHAPIRO: Oh, oh, oh.

LEVINE: Okay, so—

SHAPIRO: Oh, [unclear]. And I brought this on my shoulders, you know, in a [unclear] how we started to eat. He—he give a lot because he know that are four people. My brothers, three, my mother's four.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. What did you think about America before you came? What did you respect or did you have any ideas?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: How did you feel about coming to this country?

SHAPIRO: I didn't want to go but she—we didn't want to go by train. We're not used to it. We used to go work and we used to—in other words, [unclear] we had to take us—a bus and at the bus I—a [unclear]. They used [unclear] the—

LEVINE: Train?

SHAPIRO: No, it's not the train. It's an open, like we had an open—

LEVINE: Like a—a cart and wagon? A wagon?

SHAPIRO: No, no. A cart, I think. A [unclear] with seats.

LEVINE: Oh.

SHAPIRO: It's impossible. If you had come, let's say, two years ago or three years ago to take oral—

LEVINE: [sentence unclear].

SHAPIRO: Oh—oh, yeah. I could explain better.

LEVINE: Okay, let's talk about the voyage but if you remember other things about your childhood [unclear].

SHAPIRO: I was very sick in the ship.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: In fact, they said, “Zena, if you’re not going to eat you’re going to die right here and we’ll bury you in the—in the [unclear].” I couldn’t eat. I didn’t eat. I didn’t like what they gave there in the—on the ship. Borsht and, you know, the Russian food. Borsht and then a lot of bread and—and [chuckles] other than the long tables, and you’re seated here you know, in that [unclear] table. So here’s people and we’re here and the ship was, you know, in the weather, shaky. So the plates used to [unclear]. [chuckles] This made me laugh when I heard that. I remember I had to grab the plates and go to somebody else. That’s [unclear]. [laughs]

HIMAN: They were seasick. She was seasick through the whole ship. I don’t know if I should interject but that was what she said.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: Sickness through the whole trip.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And the trip was long. It was about 21 days?

SHAPIRO: No, no, no, no, no.

LEVINE: No?

SHAPIRO: No. I [unclear]. No, Laura. Don’t laugh. You have to help me, Laura. You’re here to help me if you know better—

HIMAN: [unclear] told me it was 21 days. All the years, I remember you telling me it was 21 days.

SHAPIRO: [unclear].

HIMAN: And now you say no. Don’t you—you don’t remember.

SHAPIRO: I don’t remember [unclear].

LEVINE: Okay.

HIMAN: Three weeks, three weeks, three weeks.

LEVINE: Okay.

SHAPIRO: Oh, there is my brother.

LEVINE: Okay. Did anything happen on board ship that you remember, besides being sick?

SHAPIRO: I was sick; I couldn't eat.

MAN: Hello.

LEVINE: Hello.

SHAPIRO: That's a [unclear].

MAN: Is everybody happy?

SHAPIRO: That's a [unclear].

HIMAN: Sit down and listen.

SHAPIRO: Ninety-one.

LEVINE: We—let me just pause for [tape off/on]—

HIMAN: Don't say anything while she's talking.

MAN: Huh.

HIMAN: Don't say anything.

LEVINE: You tell yours after.

HIMAN: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay. So, Zena—

SHAPIRO: [sentence unclear].

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

SHAPIRO: Oh, this I'll never forget. The Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: You knew what that was?

SHAPIRO: Yes.

LEVINE: How—

SHAPIRO: And then—and then how about on the—the tour in New York. And this is the Statue of Liberty that takes us here. And there is—you know how [unclear], oh, my God. We got the—we cried and laughed and

everything. And we came. We came. We came. We came. [unclear] now.

LEVINE: No, I'm not. We do a little more [unclear].

SHAPIRO: Oh.

LEVINE: What—so then what? Do you remember anything about Ellis Island, your impressions of that?

SHAPIRO: We weren't there. We were on the ship and it was on a [unclear] on a Sunday came in. So they didn't let us off because it was Sunday. So we were in that ship that Sunday and they fed us. We couldn't eat already. That's how much they gave us to eat, yeah, because it's Sunday and [sighs] this I never forget when the ship's [unclear].

LEVINE: [unclear], yeah.

SHAPIRO: And that's it. The men—the ship men said, "Okay, you stay here. You're going to eat all day long. We're going to give you—feed you and you going to eat. And—and—and tomorrow we'll let you off." He'll tell you. Maybe he remembers Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So—so what about meeting your father?

SHAPIRO: Well, he couldn't come up [unclear] Sunday. They wouldn't let us off on a Sunday. So Monday they let us off and my father was [several words unclear]. When he came he knew that the [unclear] came with us and we're stuck. So my father took his cousin from New York. My father stayed in Boston. He lived in Boston. But the Statue of Liberty's in New York, [unclear]. So—so—

LEVINE: So—so when you were let off the ship, then did you go into Ellis Island?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, we had to go. They had to—

LEVINE: And what—what happened there?

SHAPIRO: Nothing. After Ellis Island we went to my aunt. There's an aunt in New York.

LEVINE: But how about the reunion with your father? Do you remember that?

SHAPIRO: Well, of course.

LEVINE: What was that like?

SHAPIRO: Don't remember.

LEVINE: No.

SHAPIRO: See, this I can't remember what happened.

LEVINE: Okay. That's okay.

SHAPIRO: Oh, that's one thing I asked my father, "Pa, where is your"—my father had what'd you call it?

LEVINE: Mustache.

SHAPIRO: Mustache. That's a Russian [unclear], you know. Mustache and a little [unclear] and—I say, "Well, did you do [unclear] Russian? What did you do with it?" He says, "Here we don't need it." I remember that's the first words I asked him. "Pa, what'd you do with your mustache and with your beard?" I—somehow, I didn't recognize him already without a—clean face.

LEVINE: And then did—did you have to stay at Ellis Island at all?

SHAPIRO: No, no. We haven't done none. We stayed there for a night and we took the train and we went to Boston.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impressions about the United States, the first—

SHAPIRO: Yeah, it was snowing—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SHAPIRO: —the [unclear] and [unclear] and—and there were—I think there's still singles. There were still single. So they came to see us and my aunt and my uncle said, "Leave them alone. They're too tired. I'm going to"—she put out on the floor something to sleep and she put us to sleep, my aunt. She was a doll, I remember.

LEVINE: And then the next day you took the train?

SHAPIRO: The next day we went to the station, then we took the train. We went to Boston and when my father took us to Boston, you know, he prepared

the home for us to come. Yeah. We were—we were fugitives, like they say, you know, all this time until—until he brought—rented an apartment. So—

LEVINE: Do you remember where it was?

SHAPIRO: So when we came that day and we had [unclear]—like—no, not that train. What do you call that, Morris? The kranke [PP]. You know, the horses—

HIMAN: Ta—a taxi?

SHAPIRO: No, no, no. The horses used to—

HIMAN: Trolley.

SHAPIRO: A trolley.

MAN: Trolley.

SHAPIRO: Yeah. Took us to the station and we took the sta—the train and we came from New York to Boston. And he took us to—to see the—the rooms that he attended to. This is something that I forget.

HIMAN: Where?

SHAPIRO: Ah!

HIMAN: Where? Where was it?

SHAPIRO: In—not in New York; in Boston already.

HIMAN: Boston.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, we did [unclear]. And he took me around [unclear] with that. I was his favorite. This [unclear] a beautiful room, beautiful. At that time, it was beautiful because we didn't know what was living with the beds and—and—and—and—and everything's gorgeous, gorgeous. It was [unclear] gorgeous [unclear]. But it was something. "This is your room, Zena." I said, "What do you mean? Who's going to sleep with me? Somebody? Anybody?" Said, "No, that's your room." I'm not used to—to—to my room. So he said, "No, this is your room.." He took my [unclear] brother and my other brother and showed them another bedroom and [several words unclear], two beds with bedspreads and clean. He [unclear], my father.

LEVINE: Wow.

SHAPIRO: And then he took to his bedroom and then he took us to the dining room. I couldn't—I thought I [several words unclear] or from—I didn't know what it was. He took us to the dining room. He said, "That's where we eat." I said, "You mean we don't eat in the kitchen? We're not"—"No, that's where we gonna eat." And the living room was [unclear]. He said, "This is the living room. After you eat up you go in, you sit down" I don't remember if there was music or something; I don't know. "And you'll be—and we'll talk." And then to the bathroom—he showed us the bathroom and we didn't know it's a bathroom yet.

LEVINE: You hadn't seen a bathroom.

SHAPIRO: We used to go down in the—in the yard to the bathroom. It's impossible. It's a miracle that I remember so far. It's a miracle. Morris, what were you doing in—in [unclear]—in—in Russia? What were you selling?

HIMAN: [unclear]

MORRIS: What was selling?

LEVINE: We're going to—we're going to—

HIMAN: No, don't—don't ask him yet. Wait, wait.

LEVINE: I'll ask him next—

HIMAN: Right.

LEVINE: —and then he'll tell me everything—

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: —he remembers. Okay, so—so you were just flabbergasted with all this—

SHAPIRO: Unbelievable.

LEVINE: —that you had where you were going to [unclear].

SHAPIRO: So the next day after we slept all—and I slept in my bedroom and I closed the door and it was heaven—heaven! Heaven on earth that we went through. I got—I got up. I said to my moth—ma, "I'm going to go down—my father's store. He had a store. He fixed shoes and he was

selling rubber because it was, you know, snowing that. Yeah, wintertime. So what else? What—

LEVINE: So you say, “I’m going to go downstairs.” After you slept in your own room—

SHAPIRO: Oh, I said to my mother—to—to my mother, “Ma, I’m going down to the store. I know where the store—the store is on the corner and this houses [unclear]. [chuckles] W—in the nightgown we a little nothing, like with a—and it’s snowing and I went to the store. My father saw it and says, “Zena, what did you do? You’re in America, Zena. You can’t come like this. Why didn’t you put on a dress? Why didn’t you dress up?” I said, “Why? What the matter?” “Oh, you’re in America, Zena.” I couldn’t get over it. I was so ashamed. I was already a big girl. I was 19, 20, I think. Yeah. Oh, I was so ashamed. He shamed me. So, “Listen,” he says. “Zena, when I close the store I’m going to take you and your two brothers and we’re going to sit down and I’m go—and I’m—we’re going to have supper.” My mother cooked. “And after that we’ll go in the living room.” And he showed where living room is. “And—and we gonna eat and I’ll tell you what to do and what you’re gonna do.” Well, anyways, then I went to work already.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the things your father told you about being in America, what you were supposed to do?

SHAPIRO: Yes, I don’t remember what he said but he took us, three of us, and he spoke Russian and we spoke Russian. That’s all we did—a little Jewish. And he was telling us what—I went to school.

LEVINE: So what, did you go out and buy clothes in America?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, sure. We need it. We need it too because we had to buy something. Dresses—I needed a couple of dresses. They need suits. The [unclear] my mother a dress. My mother was a heavy woman, very heavy.

LEVINE: So then what—do you remember going to school in America?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah. I went to school. In fact, I—I am so sorry up to now. I—I was very good in school already, you know, in the Russian schools. So to the end of the season that, you know—so I—I got a book, a beautiful book in saying, it’s like—like here, they give you when you good in—

HIMAN: [unclear].

SHAPIRO: [unclear]. And somebody said to me [unclear], “Zena, don’t take it. They’re not going to let you in America if you’re going to take that [unclear] book that they gave you. Don’t take it.” And I didn’t take it and I am so sorry. Oh, a beautiful [unclear] book, how nice I was, how—how I was, ah—

LEVINE: So did you go to school at night in America?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, it was then that I used to come from work and have supper and go to—

LEVINE: What did you do for work when you first came?

SHAPIRO: I don’t know where in the world did I work to—to [unclear]. That time, nobody would go to market without a [unclear]—a [unclear] and dressed nice. What did you ask me? I forgot.

LEVINE: I asked you about—

HIMAN: I thought you asked—

MAN: Work—what kind of work does she do?

LEVINE: Yeah, the work that you did.

SHAPIRO: Yeah. I don’t know where I learned—oh, in the shop. My father had a—a friend. He had a shop in town and—and the shop is hats, ladies hats, because over there, even if you went shopping, you had to have a hat. Nice hats, nice dress, you know. So I don’t know where—

LEVINE: So you helped—

SHAPIRO: Oh.

LEVINE: —with the hats.

SHAPIRO: A woman—a woman helped me to—to dress the hats.

HIMAN: Design them. They were design—she was a designer.

LEVINE: Really?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, to--to—

LEVINE: What kinds of things did you do with the hats?

SHAPIRO: I put ribbons, pieces of weavings, [unclear], flowers, you know, to the [unclear] summertime. That's what I had. In other words, I—I—I fixed it up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: And I was a very good fixer-up; I'm telling you. They all wanted me I should go with them. But I said, "No, I'm going to stay with Mr. Cohen [PP]. He showed me a little and he" —

LEVINE: Mr. Cohen taught you how to—how to—

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: —[unclear] hats.

SHAPIRO: No, he didn't. There—there's a woman—

LEVINE: A woman.

SHAPIRO: He gave me a woman that she was the—the manager. So she used to show me.

LEVINE: So then what—wh—how—how about learning English? How was that for you?

SHAPIRO: Not too well on that. [chuckles]

LEVINE: You're very good at English. How—but when you were first learning—

SHAPIRO: Hard. Really hard. Yeah, really hard.

LEVINE: Did the—

SHAPIRO: Russian, Jewish and English—I went through it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: I went to school where—

LEVINE: What was night school like?

SHAPIRO: You went after—after work I used to come home and have something to eat and go to nighttime school. And it was nighttime school [unclear].

LEVINE: Then did you start to make friends?

SHAPIRO: Oh, yeah. [chuckles] I'll never forget. I made a friend. She said, "Zena"—that's when I met my—my husband, my—

LEVINE: How did you meet him?

SHAPIRO: My—she said, "Zena." She's dead already two years so on the weekends there—there is a Jewish baker, the—what do you call the Jewish baker?

LEVINE: The Forward?

SHAPIRO: The Forward used to have dancing Saturday night so she used to go already, so she took me. We went dancing and I met my husband and his brother there. They were here two years before we came, Myer [PP] Shapiro and Albert Shapiro. And they both were fighting for me to dance with them. Who can remember? It's impossible, impossible.

HIMAN: You're doing all right.

LEVINE: You're fine.

SHAPIRO: Impossible.

LEVINE: What—so what did you—Myer, is that—is that—

SHAPIRO: That's my husband.

LEVINE: —who you married. What did you like about him?

SHAPIRO: Oh, they were handsome. They were handsome and they best Russian—Russian dancers. And that's all I knew what to dance is Russian. And they knew Russian dances so they were fighting between themselves who should take me out, this one or this one, or this one—finally, I decided. [laughs] An old one, younger one.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Myer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you like America in the beginning?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: No.

SHAPIRO: No, no.

LEVINE: What—

SHAPIRO: I was—I—I was dumb. I wasn't dumb in Russian but I was so dumb in a new language with new things that I was—what does it say that the—

HIMAN: Overwhelmed.

SHAPIRO: Overwhelmed in [unclear]. I don't know.

LEVINE: Right.

SHAPIRO: I had to change. I had to change from duck to the water. I mean, languages and—and [unclear] and—and—and—and I got that book that they give from school. I told you I didn't take it with me.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: And I gave it to a friend of mine. I should have taken it.

LEVINE: So when did you start liking the United States? When did you start to change so that you felt comfortable and you were glad to be here?

SHAPIRO: When I got married already and I had children. I had two children, a boy and a girl and I—and I had to. But the only thing I can never forget is washing diapers.

LEVINE: Why is that?

SHAPIRO: At that time, there was no machines, nothing. I had to wash diapers myself. Every morning, seven o'clock I had to wash diapers from her and from my—my son. And this I didn't like. Where do I [unclear] diapers? I was learning [unclear].

LEVINE: So did you stop working then when you had your children?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, then I stop. I didn't say it yet the way it should be said, all this, all the—

LEVINE: You're saying it just fine, just fine. Now, okay. So what do you feel proud of? What do you feel proud? What do you feel satisfied that you did in your lifetime?

SHAPIRO: I was proud of my children, my two beautiful children.

LEVINE: And why don't you say their names?

SHAPIRO: Laura and Freddy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: I was very—I'm very proud of them. They grew up beautiful. They got married. They lead their own lives. I lead my own life. I have a home. What else do I need at my age already? My age is shaky. [laughs]

LEVINE: Wh—when you think about coming here as a young woman, coming to this country and—

SHAPIRO: I was kind of afraid. And I had a boyfriend there—you know, friend. He was there five years and I was there a year or two. So he used to take me to show me Kharkov where we lived, this—the—the city. Beautiful city, Kharkov.

HIMAN: Can I interject for a second?

LEVINE: Yeah, go ahead.

HIMAN: You can shut it off so I can just [unclear].

LEVINE: We're going to pause here for a second. [tape off/on] We're going to resume here. And Laura just brought up your neighbor that you had, the musician. Why don't you tell about him?

SHAPIRO: He's the biggest here in America, the biggest—what was it? [unclear].

HIMAN: [unclear] violinist.

LEVINE: The violin?

SHAPIRO: Right. What was his name? Oh, he was something. And when I came to America, already I was here and I came to New York. And I wanted to see him and we were friends. They didn't let me because where he lived, he had a—

HIMAN: Security?

SHAPIRO: Ah, what do you call it?

HIMAN: A whole security—

SHAPIRO: Yeah, security. You couldn't come near. He became a millionaire. He had just a mother, no father.

WOMAN: [unclear] I think. I can't remember the name.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, I can't remember his name. Oh! Was he good! And they didn't let me go see—and he knew me.

LEVINE: Now, had he come also from Russia?

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, sure. He didn't have to worry already. It took him—

LEVINE: Now, were there mostly people who had immigrated—like, in your neighborhood, had a t of people come from Russia?

SHAPIRO: Almost—almost all were—were [unclear]—

LEVINE: In Boston? When you came to Boston.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: When you came to that country—

SHAPIRO: Oh, oh.

LEVINE: —were your neighbors also Russian?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: No.

SHAPIRO: No, no, no. My father talk—talked already a little English.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Because he was—he was [unclear] for what, five years?

HIMAN: Almost eight years.

SHAPIRO: Eight years. So he learned already.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HIMAN: Did you not live in a Jewish neighborhood?

WOMAN: No.

SHAPIRO: No, no.

HIMAN: Okay. But they have a lot of family.

SHAPIRO: Oh, what were the boys' names? Oh, God. Everybody—

HIMAN: [sentence unclear].

SHAPIRO: Oh!

LEVINE: And you knew him?

SHAPIRO: Yeah. We played together in the same yard. And their mother—his mother used to holler through the window in Russian, "Come on out. You have to do your lessons." And he played beautiful.

HIMAN: Say it in Russian. I'd like to hear it in Russian.

LEVINE: How did she say it in Russian?

HIMAN: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: How did she call her son.

SHAPIRO: [chuckles] I don't—

LEVINE: Do you re—

SHAPIRO: What was her name, Laura?

HIMAN: [unclear].

SHAPIRO: Oh, [unclear]. He never spoke—she never spoke to him in Jewish. He only knew Russian.

LEVINE: And what kind of a little boy—well, he wasn't a little boy. He was what? In his 20s?

SHAPIRO: When?

LEVINE: When you knew him?

HIMAN: Younger.

LEVINE: He was—

SHAPIRO: Younger, younger. We were playing together in the yard.

HIMAN: [unclear]

SHAPIRO: And the mother used to holler out, “[unclear], do your lessons.” I remember from [unclear]. He was handsome. Yeah. I ho—I wonder he is alive. I am. [laughs]

HIMAN: I think he’s—I think he’s gone. [chuckles]

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, so how do you feel about having come to this country as a young girl?

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: As a young woman?

SHAPIRO: How did I feel then?

LEVINE: How do you feel now?

SHAPIRO: I did—oh, now. Now it’s my home. It’s my—that’s what I’m going to be until I [unclear].

LEVINE: And do you feel like you have a side of you that’s Russian? I mean, do you have any sense of being—

SHAPIRO: No, nothing. No, no. I am—I am out of it.

LEVINE: You’re out of it.

SHAPIRO: That’s—oh, for so long. How long I been here in—I’m in America?

HIMAN: From ’22 to ’97.

LEVINE: Seven.

HIMAN: Seven.

SHAPIRO: That's how long?

HIMAN: [unclear] '22 to '97. Oh, my God! Seventy-five years.

SHAPIRO: So I forget all about Russian and I didn't want to hear and I don't care if I wouldn't even go there. The only th—thing, they're going to take me there and I'll die. I have my—my what do you call it?

LEVINE: Your grave?

SHAPIRO: My grave near my husband.

LEVINE: He's also in Russia?

HIMAN: No, no. He's here in Massachusetts but she can't remember.

LEVINE: Oh, you're going back to Boston area. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: That's where I'm going.

LEVINE: Okay. How—

SHAPIRO: He's waiting for me.

LEVINE: How is this time in your life, your old-age time?

SHAPIRO: It's very lonely, honey. Friends—no more friends. I used to play cards everyday. We used to go out. We used to go out to eat. As soon as you can't do nothing, you don't belong. Some—my friends, I find yet—they're younger than I am and some are worse. They go already to homes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: That's all.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SHAPIRO: There is so much here to talk—

LEVINE: Yes—

SHAPIRO: There is no end, so much to talk. Huh. But this I'll never forget, the year I am talking I see my bedroom. [chuckles]

LEVINE: The bedroom [unclear]?

- SHAPIRO: My bed—yeah, my bedroom, my own bedroom! Ah! [unclear]! How did you do it? How did you do it, Pa?
- HIMAN: How about the Second World War? What did you do in this country for Russia? That's interesting.
- LEVINE: Oh. Well, first, let me ask you about the Depression. Do you remember when the Depression came?
- HIMAN: Uh-hmm.
- SHAPIRO: Where? Here?
- LEVINE: Yeah.
- SHAPIRO: I remember—
- LEVINE: In the '30s—in the 1930s.
- SHAPIRO: Had a [unclear]. They used to say they used to give out [unclear] here. [chuckles] I said, "In America, my God. We—starving in Russia but not in Amer"—but in time of Depression, yes. They used to give soup and bread. They [unclear] days and nights and hours to gather all this.
- HIMAN: She couldn't take me out of the hospital; there was no money. They wouldn't—they wouldn't let her take me out of the hospital. They had no money to pay [unclear]. He'd just opened a little business, had no money coming in. She could tell you all about if she could remember.
- LEVINE: So times were hard during the Depression—
- SHAPIRO: Yeah, hard.
- LEVINE: —when Laura was born.
- SHAPIRO: Very hard, very hard. Very hard. There were hard, hard, hard without her. When they grew up and they got married already and they became their own bosses, that's when I said [sighs loudly]. [laughter]
- LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles] And then how about the Second World War? How did that affect you?
- SHAPIRO: The Second World War?
- LEVINE: That was, like, in 1940 and in the early 1940s.

SHAPIRO: Where was I? Here already?

LEVINE: Yeah, you were already here, after the Depression.

SHAPIRO: Honey, there was so much to eat we didn't care what wars [unclear], anything, as long as there was enough to eat. That's what we wanted.

LEVINE: What were you [several words unclear]?

HIMAN: You worked for the Russian warriors.

SHAPIRO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

HIMAN: You mentioned that to me.

LEVINE: The Russian warriors.

SHAPIRO: The Russian warrior.

LEVINE: What was that? What did you do?

SHAPIRO: We used to collect money and send it to Russia.

HIMAN: During the Second war.

SHAPIRO: That was in America. And I was in America already and I stand in the corners and I said, "That's for—that's for Russia." At that time, we were helping the Russians. "That's for Russia. Please help. Please help." They used to give [telephone rings] [unclear]. You got it, Laura.

HIMAN: Yeah, that's a—they had a thrift shop.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: You had a thrift shop.

SHAPIRO: Sold—we sold—we sold and we—I don't know. I don't know, honestly. What did you ask me?

LEVINE: I was asking about a thrift shop. What—what—

SHAPIRO: We used to have a thrift shop. I used to go on to the stores and collect little tables and—and clothes and everything. And we used to sell it and give it to the—in the—in the Second World War.

LEVINE: Wow. Who had the thrift shop? Who—who ran it?

SHAPIRO: From the Ameri—from the Russia people, yeah, [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of that has to do with your life in Russia, coming to this country?

SHAPIRO: Kept company in Russia with girls, with boys, went to dances after work, after selling [unclear] and come home and change. And I had a fight with my brother. I came from [several words unclear]. He's next after me. I had—he wouldn't remember. He had a blouse, a boy's blouse. And I came from work and I washed that and I got a skirt and I couldn't find my blouse. So I asked him, "This"—I asked him from the blouse. He said, "No, you're not going to get it." [unclear]

LEVINE: You were not going to share it.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SHAPIRO: I'll share it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: It's a—it's a—"No, you're not going to get it," and he didn't give it to me. I don't remember where I got a blouse or a—or a shirt or something. And I got it and I went to the dance—

LEVINE: So you—

SHAPIRO: —with the soldiers. The soldiers were dancing then.

LEVINE: So you always like to dance, huh?

SHAPIRO: Yeah. After work, mind you. After the [unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah.

SHAPIRO: He has his story.

LEVINE: Okay. Now we're going to hear from your brother—

SHAPIRO: Morris, Mor—

LEVINE: —Morris. And I want to thank you. You remembered some wonderful things.

SHAPIRO: Anytime I think—anytime you feel like to come over—

LEVINE: Oh, thanks.

SHAPIRO: Maybe I'll know something more now.

LEVINE: You did very well.

SHAPIRO: Because this is—this is for the people.

MORRIS: She done a good job.

LEVINE: Very good.

MORRIS: I couldn't do it.

LEVINE: And I want to thank you. Well, we'll get whatever you remember in the next one. Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been talking with Zena Shapiro, who remembers some wonderful things—

SHAPIRO: Won—

LEVINE: —from the Ukraine and coming here when she was 20 years old in 1922.

SHAPIRO: And getting married right away to my—one from the brothers that wanted to dance with me.

LEVINE: Right.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And—and she is 95 at the time—

SHAPIRO: Ninety-five.

LEVINE: —of this interview. Okay, and I'm signing off.

SHAPIRO: But you don't want more maybe sometimes. Can you—

LEVINE: Okay.

SHAPIRO: Yeah.

LEVINE: We'll—[tape off/on]—we're going to do a little bit more here because there were some stories that—

SHAPIRO: That [unclear].

LEVINE: —we didn't say the first time. Tell about your mother when she was in this country and she would—and she would be pregnant and she would go with a cape on. Do you remember that?

SHAPIRO: I don't think she was pregnant in this country when she came back from Russia to the fa—to the father. And he couldn't be pregnant. She was [unclear].

LEVINE: No, when she was here and your father was here.

SHAPIRO: Oh.

LEVINE: Do you remember that what she was—

SHAPIRO: I don't think she was pregnant. No.

LEVINE: No?

SHAPIRO: Nobody was born here. I was born in Russia. He was born in Russia and they had the one in Russia too.

LEVINE: Yeah, but did she—did she—was she pregnant but she had abortions in this country?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: No.

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: Okay. [tape off/on] Now, Laura mentioned that you had—you remember the pogroms, what Morris talk about.

SHAPIRO: The killing, yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

SHAPIRO: I remember—I think that my mother took me and Morris—Arthur wasn't born—in the pogrom and put us in an oven that baked bread and closed it. You know, they—until they get a little bit more quieter. You know, they were running around and looking for people, for Jews to kill.

LEVINE: Did you ever see that?

SHAPIRO: No.

LEVINE: No.

SHAPIRO: No, but I—no. In fact, my father took me and him and [several words unclear] Arthur, maybe—no. Arthur, no. Arthur wasn't born here. So—

LEVINE: So you had to run and hide; is that it? If you—if they were coming?

SHAPIRO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So they put us—my father put us in the oven and the oven has—has a—a door that you close and you [unclear] until it quiet down, because they were looking for—for somebody to kill kids, mostly.

LEVINE: Huh.

SHAPIRO: Yeah. Oh, that's—this is unbelievable.

[END OF INTERVIEW]