

EI-880

MAURICE NEU

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay. Today is May 15th, 1997 and I'm here with Maurice Neu, who came from Poland in 1922 when he was eight years of age. Today, Mr. Neu is 82 years of age at the time of this interview. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and we're here in Florida where Mr. Neu lives. Okay, if we could start with you giving your birth date and where in Poland you were born.

NEU: I was born on January 1st, 1915. And I was born in—from what I was told, I was born in Lumberg [PH], which was eastern Poland. The name was changed to Lvov [PH], which is—it is now called. N—surely after I was born, my mother left my father and we moved to a city called Br—Brzezov in central Poland near—I believe it was near Krakow. And I lived with my grandfather and grandmother and my mother at—for—until we came to this country.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, is it—do you spell that B-R-Z-E-Z-O-V?

NEU: I believe that's the way it's called. That's the way it's spelled.

LEVINE: Spelled. Now, how about Yablonka [PH]?

NEU: Yablonka. My grandfather had a—a—a stone quarry in Yablonka, which was near Brzezov. And I lived there with him from the time I was two years old until the time we left for the United States.

LEVINE: I see. So your memories are really of Brzezov.

NEU: Brzezov.

LEVINE: Brzezov.

NEU: Yeah, because my sister was born in Brzezov. She was born six years after I was. She was born on October 12th, 1921, I believe it was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. Well, so you have no memories of your father.

NEU: None.

LEVINE: But you have memories of your mother. What—

NEU: My mother was with—was with me all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was your mother's name?

NEU: My mother's name was Frieda [PH].

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

NEU: Her maiden name was Breitowich.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

NEU: B-R-E-I-T-O-W-I-C-H.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And now the—the grandmother and grandfather, they were your mother's—

NEU: My mother's parents.

LEVINE: —parents.

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember anything about the stone quarry?

NEU: I remember it was—I don't remember too much about the stone quarry. I remember a little a bit about the house, and we had a small farm at the same time. And I remember when I was—I believe when I was five years old I was playing out in the yard and I tripped and fell and—and that's when I got this scar on my face. That's about the only thing that I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember—I mean, did—what were most people doing? I mean, were they working in the quarries or were they agricultural—

NEU: Mostly agricultural.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah. It was a small town. I don't remember too much about it but I know I used to go into the chicken coops and grab—and grab the eggs after they [several words unclear] [chuckles] and ate—ate a couple of eggs.

LEVINE: Raw?

NEU: Raw, yeah. That was—that was one of my favorite—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NEU: —things. And other than that, I—I don't remember too much.

LEVINE: Now, did you go to school at all?

NEU: I just went to—I did go to—to a Hebrew school.

LEVINE: Cheder [PH]?

NEU: To a cheder.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: In fact, it was a rabbi that—that I walked to from the—from my house to—to his—to the school, whatever it was. And that's the only education I had when I was in—in Europe, in Poland.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how about your grandmother and grandfather? Do you have any memories of them? Things they did? Things you did with them or—

NEU: Well—

LEVINE: —anything?

NEU: My grandfather was very religious. He was a hassad [PH]. He was a very religious man. And then, of course he took me to the—to the synagogue all the time. And when we came to this country, they came. We were all together. In fact, one of my uncles—I had—my grandparents had three sons and three daughters that were living in Chicago. They were all living in Chicago. And one of the sons came to the Uni—to Poland to bring us here. See, we couldn't—

LEVINE: Oh, that's your uncle that you—

NEU: Yes.

LEVINE: —who was traveling with you.

NEU: Right, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: He brought us here and, of course, he took us immediately to Chicago.

LEVINE: I see. Now, was your mother working at all in Poland?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: No.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: And it was just you and your sister, who was born six years later—

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: —and no other children in the family.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: So you were the first child.

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: Mm-hmm.

LEVINE: And [clears throat] do you remember—now, was it—was it a strictly Jewish community where you were living or was it a mixed—

NEU: It was a shtetl, actually.

LEVINE: It was a shtetl.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Because they—they s—actually, when we left Poland there were pogroms going on. You know, the Russians were—were coming in and wiping out towns. So actually, from what I was told, when—when my uncle came to take us away, they hid m—me and my sister under the—in the—under the wagon to take us, you know, to go to—to go to—we were—we were going to France—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay.

NEU: —to get on the boat.

LEVINE: Let me just—okay, we're resuming here. So did you have any other contact with anti-Semitic people that you recall as a child?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: No. Okay. And how about your grandmother and grandfather? Could you describe them?

NEU: [chuckles] I could have brought a picture.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NEU: My grandfather had a long beard and my grandmother was a little woman, very small, very tiny. And they were, of course, from—I—I—I remember very vividly about—from the time we came to Chicago, I remember everything.

LEVINE: Right. But they traveled with you.

NEU: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Your grandparents.

NEU: We all came together. By the way, on the ship—on the S.S. Paris [PH], we entered—we got on the S.S. Paris in La Havre. And I remember very vividly when we were boarding the ship. I felt like I was walking into a tremendous hotel or something like that. You know, the—it was just—just beautiful. And I had a wonderful time on the—on the ship.

LEVINE: On the ship.

NEU: I used to run—they tell me I ran from one end to the other. But, unfortunately, my sister, when we got close to New York she got very ill. And they had to take her off the ship and take her to New York. They had a special boat, I guess, that—I don't think they had helicopters at that time.

LEVINE: No.

NEU: They had—they took a—they took her off to—off the—off of Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: When we got it into Ellis Island she got very ill, or she got ill on the boat. And, oh, this was before we got to Ellis Island. Right. She could probably tell you better than I can. And they took her to a hospital in New York and we stayed on Ellis Island for a week until s—they brought her back.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. Do you know what she had?

NEU: I—I don't know what it was. It wasn't seasickness. I—I think it was pneumonia or something like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Very ill. They had to take her off.

LEVINE: And she was about two years old.

NEU: She was two years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, before you got on the ship, do you remember leaving Brzezov?

NEU: We went on wagon—in a wagon to a—to a railroad.

LEVINE: W—was it at night?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: Or was it—

NEU: Well, it was—I think it was at night. That I—that—

LEVINE: I mean, it—

NEU: That—that—

LEVINE: Was it that you were, like, smuggling yourselves out? [chuckles] Or was it—

NEU: Well, they were—they were smuggling us to avoid the Russian—the Russian soldiers or whatever. I think it was at night we had to be smuggled out over to a railroad station. And we took the railroad from— from there. I think—I don't remember what city it was. It wasn't from Brzezov. From Brzezov, we had to go to either Summok [PH]—I think it was Summok. And from there we took the train to France.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: To—to La Havre.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that leg of the journey?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: Going—uh-huh. Uh-huh.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: And before we leave Poland, is there anything else you remember about the town or the people or the—maybe the—a rabbi or the—

NEU: No.

LEVINE: [unclear]

NEU: The only thing [chuckles]—one—one thing I do remember. We were sitting at a seder in my grandfather's house, of course. And my mother was preg—my mother was pregnant at the time. She was born while we were sitting at the seder. She gave birth [chuckles] to my sister.

LEVINE: Wow.

NEU: That I remember.

LEVINE: And of course, she gave birth at home, right?

NEU: At home, of course, and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: —it was right on P—on Passover.

LEVINE: Wow. Hmm.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: And any other religious ceremonial kinds of things that took place in—

NEU: No, my grandfather had his own Torah, which he brought to this country.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, it sounds as though your—you were not a—an impoverished family.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: You—you—

NEU: No. We weren't impoverished. We—see, my mother—I—I must—my mother was a deaf mute.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: Yeah. And I understand, although I never saw my father, I understand he was a deaf mute also.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: And of course, she was a—a very good seamstress, by the way. I—I think—I think that she was doing some seamstress work when we were in Brzezov. And when we came to this county she did—she did go to work in a—in a shop doing—doing some sewing and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Is there anything you could say about how she was treated, being a—a deaf mute? Or—

NEU: Well—

LEVINE: —was there anything about medical care or anything in Poland—

NEU: No.

LEVINE: —that—

NEU: No.

LEVINE: —pertains to that?

NEU: No, not I know of.

LEVINE: [unclear].

NEU: Hmm-uh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Huh.

NEU: Not that I know of.

LEVINE: So let's see. So then, getting back to the S.S. Paris.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you—you had such a good time on—

NEU: Oh, I—

LEVINE: —the ship.

NEU: I had a wonderful time on the ship.

LEVINE: Were there people of all nationalities coming over? Or were they m—
mainly coming from Eastern Europe or—

NEU: I—a good number of them, I believe, were from Eastern Europe. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And was—when you were coming into the New York harbor, do you recall
seeing the Statue of Liberty or—or—or New York skyline? Any of that
kind of thing?

NEU: None of that.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Well, I imagine you—

NEU: We went right to Dal—to Ellis Island and—and of course, we got off and we were put into—into rooms, I gu—I don't remember, really.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: But I was too active [chuckles] and too involved in—in my own things to—to notice all those things.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. So when your sister was returned to the family—

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: —did someone meet you somewhere?

NEU: My uncle was with us.

LEVINE: Oh. Oh, that's right.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

NEU: My uncle was with.

LEVINE: And was he already an American citizen?

NEU: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: I see. So you didn't have any trouble—

NEU: All the—all—all his—all my grandfather's children were already citizens in—in Chicago. In fact, they came—I think before they came arou—before the First World War.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, I see.

NEU: So they were all very established in businesses and so forth.

LEVINE: I see.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: So how old were your grandmother and grandfather? Do you have any sense of that?

NEU: I don't know.

LEVINE: Did they seem like they were elderly people at that point?

NEU: Well, they were elderly. My grandfather passed away—my grandmother passed away shortly after we—we got to Chicago. She was not well, very, very frail. My grandfather—in fact, when he came—when we came to Chicago [clears throat], we all moved into one a—one apartment, like, you know, like, flat. And we all lived together. And he, having his own Torah, he had services in his house every—every morning and every evening.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, was this like a railroad flat? Like front to back?

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: With—uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And it had, like, an airshaft between the buildings? Do you remember what it was like?

NEU: No, it was a three-story building.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: And we were on the second floor and went from front—from front to back and there was an alley in the back, of course, with a porch and so forth.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NEU: You know, it was a good size—good-sized apartment.

LEVINE: Now, were your uncles living in there too?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: No.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: This was—this was the people you—

NEU: My uncles were well established. They—

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: They all worked. One of 'em was very wealthy and—

LEVINE: What—what kind of business had they gone into here?

NEU: Well, my au—they were both in the butcher business, to begin with, when we—when we got to Chicago. The two uncles were both—no, all of 'em—the three of 'em were all in the butcher business.

LEVINE: Now, had they been in that business in—in Poland or was that a new kind of a—

NEU: I have no idea what—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NEU: —business they were in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

NEU: And then the—my—my wife's—my mother's sister was married to a man that was in the gasoline business. Very—they were quite wealthy. That was one of her sisters. And the other sister also was married to a—to a poultry—wasn't a butcher. He had a poultry store. You know, chicken—chicken market. So they were all well—well established.

LEVINE: When you say gasoline business, what—what—what do you mean? Like a—a gas—

NEU: Hmm.

LEVINE: —station or a—

NEU: He had several gas stations.

LEVINE: Stations.

NEU: Yeah, he had several gas stations. In fact, he had a wholesale gas—a distributor.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Okay. Now, can you describe where you moved into? Now, was it—did you have, like, running water? Was it hot and cold?

NEU: Oh, yeah. We had running water. We had steam. It was on Division Street in Chicago, which was all Jewish. The whole area was Jewish. It was a three-flat building with stores on the bottom and had a streetcar track [unclear]—

LEVINE: Like a trolley?

NEU: No—yeah, were regular trolleys, streetcars.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: And we lived there from the time we got to Chicago, was '23. We lived there, oh, 12, 13 years. And I was—I was entered into public school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: I was eight years old and I didn't know a word of English. All I knew was Polish and Yiddish. And by the time I—I graduated in six years. It was an eight-year school. You know, a public school. I graduated in six years. Yeah, six years. And by the time I graduated I was fluent in—in—in English. Forgot every word of Polish. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Ah.

NEU: We didn't speak it in our house so I forgot every word of it.

LEVINE: Did you speak Yiddish at home?

NEU: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah? And how—can you say anything about learning English, how it was for you?

NEU: It was easy for me. I have no accent and I got through grade school without any problems.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Without any problems.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother and grandparents—did—did they try to hold onto some ways—European ways? How—what was their attitude toward the traditional and—

NEU: Oh, they held on—

LEVINE: —American—

NEU: They held on completely. They—like I say, my grandfather had his own synagogue. He had people—you know, every day we had a minion in the house.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: And my uncles were—were very active in a—in a big shul that was close by. And in fact, one of my uncles was president and they were—they were influential in building that shul. So when I was bar mitzvahed, I was bar mitzvahed in that—in that synagogue.

LEVINE: I see.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Can you say anything about the traditional ways of your—of your grandparents that—that, when they were transplanted to this country, seemed Old World?

NEU: They didn't change. Didn't change.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: No. Everything was strict—strictly orthodox.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Everything was strictly orthodox.

LEVINE: Did—did they have certain attitudes that they tried to instill in you that you can think of?

NEU: Well, my grandfather—I was his favorite grandson. I must say that.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NEU: Because, of course—because he raised me, more or less. And he introduced me. I used to sing. That's when I started to sing, when—when we had Friday night, I would sing [unclear]. I would sing and he was—he loved to have people listen to me sing and listen to me daven and do certain—do certain prayers. I could do 'em from memory. So, in fact, he started me—it wasn't—when I was 11 years old, one of my uncles had me try out for the choir in the—in the shul. And I was hired immediately. And that's where I got my training, more or less.

LEVINE: Wow.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Had you—had you been known to have a good voice at—even before you came to this country?

NEU: As far as—as far as my grand—my uncles and my grandfather were concerned, yes, because they used to hear me every—every week, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: And then from—from singing in the choir, I—I traveled on the road with the cantor for a year and—

LEVINE: Like an apprenticeship, kind of?

NEU: No, it wasn't—

LEVINE: No?

NEU: —apprenticeship but it was just—I was one of the—

LEVINE: You were singing.

NEU: —choir members. And I was getting paid [chuckles] very well that—at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Even though I was only 11. I—I sang in the choir from 11 till 14 when my voice started to change. And then I started again at—at 19. Started to sing again.

LEVINE: Wow. So y—so you were—you were in school but you were still traveling with the choir?

NEU: No, no. I didn't travel. The choirs sang only on the holidays and on Saturday. There was no—no traveling at that time. Later on, after I was 19, I went with a cantor. I was traveling. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: The country.

LEVINE: Wow. How—how do you feel about that, looking back on it? Were you—were—are you happy that you were sort of pegged to have a good voice and—

NEU: Yes.

LEVINE: —[unclear]?

NEU: Of course. That's what carried me through. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

NEU: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow. Okay. So you stayed in school. You finished in six years.

NEU: I finished grade school.

LEVINE: In six years.

NEU: [unclear].

LEVINE: And then what did you do then?

NEU: Then I went into high school and [clears throat] I stayed in the high school two years. And I had to leave. I had to go to work to help support the family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what did you do?

NEU: Well, I did a lot of things. I worked in a butcher shop for several years.

LEVINE: Is this one of your uncles?

NEU: One of my—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: One of my uncles, yeah. I worked in a gas station for several years for my uncles.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Until, well, I did that—

LEVINE: Well, that must have been the Depression time by then when you were doing that.

NEU: Sure, sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: It was '28, '29, '30—in the '30s, you know. So it was—

LEVINE: Can you say anything about how the Depression affected your immediate family in particular?

NEU: The funny part of it is it had—didn't have a lot of effect on us because my uncles and my au—aunts, they—they did very well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NEU: They went through in—in good—in good shape.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you—so you—after you worked in the gas station and—and in the butcher shops, then what did you do next?

NEU: Then I—then I had a job in—a cousin of mine got me a job in a—in a, oh, a company called Embossograph [PH], which I worked for f—about five years. And I did all kinds—all kinds of work, all kinds of odd jobs.

LEVINE: What k—what kind of a company was it?

NEU: It's called Embossograph. They embossed signs and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: And what else did I do? [chuckles] I did so many things. Oh, I worked for a liquor company selling liquor and wine. And [clears throat] I got married at 23.

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

NEU: Oh, I—I belonged to a club, a bunch of boys. And we used to have dates, you know. And I met my wife—when was it? Gee, I don't even remember. [unclear]. It was on a date or something and she lived—she lived in another area. And I used to—I had a car at that time. I—I had an old car and I used to drive up and meet her, take her out. And she was only 19 when we got married.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: And then we—when we got married I moved away from Division Street and I moved up—

LEVINE: I see. So you lived in Division Street up until you got married?

NEU: Just about, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And is—what about the social clubs that you and your family members belonged to? Were they clubs of mostly people who had come from Europe?

NEU: No. Actually, all their activities were—were around the temple, around the shul, most of the activities. Of course, my—my aunts were very active in the—like Hadassah and those kind of—[unclear] and those kind of groups.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NEU: But other than that, the—the life was—was surrounded from the temple, was activated at the temple, most of it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and the activities that you—that you partook of as a young man, what kinds of things were you doing?

NEU: I was very interested in athlet—in athletics. I—when I was in high school I played soccer. I ran on the track team. And [clears throat]—and I ice-skated. I was—I raced, ice-skating.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: We had a park close by called Humboldt [PH] Park where I learned to skate very well. In fact, I was racing sk—ice-skating. That was my favorite sport. And then I belonged to a—a club of—of fellows my age. And we rented a basement in one of the hou—h—houses and that was our clubhouse. And we'd meet there and then on Sundays we'd play baseball on—and did all those things. One of my favorite that—one of my favorite things was when I was just a teenager (I mean, I was 11, 12, 13 years old) I would—we had the elevated system, you know, elevators. Elevated.

LEVINE: Elevated trains.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Some—uh-huh.

NEU: I would—we had a station there not too far from the house. I would pack a lunch and I'd get on the elevated and I'd ride all over the city. Before it got to the end of the line I would get off and change and go the other way. And that was one of my favorite things.

LEVINE: Why did you like it so much?

NEU: I don't know. I just loved to travel. I loved to look around. I—I knew more about Chicago and its—and—and the surrounding area, you know, I—like the Field Museum and the Museum of Science and Industry. That was my favorite. I would go there almost once a week and just—

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: And that was—that was one of my favorite things to do.

LEVINE: Wow.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, you must have been a good student too.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah, was a good student.

LEVINE: And did you—did you have any favorite teachers? Do you remember any teachers that took a special interest or—

NEU: One of my favorite teachers was in grammar school. Her name was Miss Purer—P-U-R-E-R. And she took a liking to me; I don't know why. But anyway, she was—she was a wonderful teacher. In fact, she gave me—she gave me a bugle. And she said, "See if you can play that." And I was the bugler in the school. I used to—and then I joined the Boy Scouts and I was bugler for the Boy Scouts. Yeah. So was—I was pretty active.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And h—was there anything about the Boy Scouts that you remember particular—

NEU: I loved it. I loved it. We used to go camping and I'd—I was—in fact, I got up to Star Scout, which was next to the highest.

LEVINE: Oh.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Let's see. So do you remember people coming to this country after you did and coming into your community at all?

NEU: No, there weren't—I think we were the last ones. [chuckles]

LEVINE: You were among the last.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: But was it—it was mostly a community of people who had immigrated?

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NEU: Right, yeah. What else—

LEVINE: Did you leave any family in Poland? Or w—were you kind of the last of your family to—

NEU: We were the last.

LEVINE: —to come?

NEU: Mm-hmm.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NEU: Yeah, we were the last.

LEVINE: Can you—d—can you imagine what life might have been like if you had—
hadn't come?

NEU: I can't imagine because the—the area was—was actually taken over by
the Russians, that—that whole—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: —area that we were at. And there were pogroms and, of course, there
was the start of the—at the First World War.

LEVINE: Right. Well, you came after it, right?

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you—

NEU: [unclear]. In 1914—

LEVINE: Right.

NEU: —was the—was—that was the end—that was the beginning of the First
World War.

LEVINE: First World War, right.

NEU: And we came right in the midst of it. That's how—

LEVINE: Oh, that's right.

NEU: Yeah, we came right in the midst of it.

LEVINE: Well, wait. You were born after it had started.

NEU: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then—I guess you couldn't really travel for some years.

NEU: It was very difficult.

LEVINE: That was really why you came when you did.

NEU: That's right.

LEVINE: Because—

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Right, uh-huh. Let's see. Well, how do you think of yourself? Do you think—do you think that, having come here as a boy and immigrated to this country, do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you are or—

NEU: Oh, there was no question about it. I—I can't imagine myself being [chuckles]—not being here, you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: And, oh, it's—it's been a hard life but I'm grateful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: It's been a hard life.

LEVINE: Do you think that—that you have any traits that come from the fact that you came from a—a country and came here and started again, your whole—well, your whole family did.

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Do you think that instilled certain kinds of traits or qualities that maybe somebody was born here might not have?

NEU: Well, I think that had a lot to do with my being able to handle—you know, handle these situations the way I—the way I did, because, like I say, I had to go to work when I was 14—14 years old, 15. And—and it wasn't easy.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: But I made the best of it.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: Without any—actually, without any help.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm, yeah.

NEU: I was more or less self-educated as far as—as far as school things.
And—but I don't have any regret—regrets at all.

LEVINE: Yeah. When you dropped out of school, was your grandfather still alive?

NEU: No.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

NEU: No. I don't think he would have allowed that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, uh-huh.

NEU: Really. I don't think he would have allowed it because I was the apple of his eye.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NEU: Just, he was so proud when I sang in the choir and he would hear me sing and it was—it was—it was wonderful.

LEVINE: And I guess he must have had that special place of the learned—

NEU: That's right.

LEVINE: —man.

NEU: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Well, actually, he—he—he was my father until he passed away.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. And what was it like for your mother coming here, given her condition? Wh—how was life for her?

NEU: It wasn't easy but my—I can say—I can say that my aunts, her two sisters, saw that she was not in need and that she had everything that she—but she—she still had to go to work for a long time.

LEVINE: Oh, so she was doing some sewing.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did she—

NEU: She worked in a shop.

LEVINE: In a shop.

NEU: Mm-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: Worked for a dressmaker or something like that.

LEVINE: I see. Oh.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. And how about your sister? She was more or less growing—grew up here.

NEU: Yeah, she grew up there. She went—she went to gra—grammar school and she went through high school. And she was working and then she got—she got married at a young age too. And she has a wonderful family. Her par—her husband passed away at a very young age, passed away; he was 56 years old. But they—they had a nice life together until he passed away. But she has some wonderful children. And she's a great grandmother. She's a great grandmother, one, two, three—I think seven times. Great grandmother. I'm a great grandfather twice, so far, and I got the third one coming. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Now, was there any matchmaking being done in—in this country—

NEU: No.

LEVINE: —that you experienced? No.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: None at all.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NEU: No.

LEVINE: Now, your wife. What was her maiden name? Her first name and her maiden name?

NEU: Her first name was Phyllis. Her maiden name was Goldkin.

LEVINE: K-I-N?

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Goldkin?

NEU: Yeah, Goldkin. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your children? Their names?

NEU: My—my oldest is Howard, who is an attorney here. The next one is Lesley [PH], who is—who lives in Seattle, Washington. He's in the computer business. And my youngest is Rita—Rita Lynn—who lives in New York, who is going to have a bar mitzvah.

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

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah? How do you—when you think back, what—what do you feel really satisfied about in your lifetime?

NEU: Well, if you would ask me what I feel unsatisfied about [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay.

NEU: More or less—I'm unsatisfied because I think, with the proper—with the proper help, I could have been a lot further ahead than I wound up.

LEVINE: You mean if you'd been able to continue in school and—

NEU: Continue school, take music lessons. You know, been able to afford to do all these things that would make me more—more advanced, more—I think I—I could have been a lot, well, a lot further advanced than I—than I did become.

LEVINE: That's probably absolutely true.

NEU: It is.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NEU: Because as far as—as far as becoming a cantor, I did that on my own. I went—I went—I studied with a—with a cantor who I sang in the choir with. And I was with him for 15 years. I eventually became his—his choir leader. And—and then I went on the road with him for a year. And that's how I—I learned the—the cantor—

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: But I never had—never had any voice lessons or music lessons or anything like that.

LEVINE: Formal training.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NEU: That's right.

LEVINE: When did you go on the road with the cantor? When—what years?

NEU: That was back in 1935.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: We were on the year—on the road for a year. The cantor had three sons and they were very well known. The three sons were also—they weren't cantors yet but they were very—had very beautiful voices. In order to go on the road, they needed a fourth voice. So they asked me to go on the road with them. I was just 19 at the time. And they called me—they called me—instead of Morris, they called me Misha, because they had a son—one of the boys was—was Morris, was Maurice. So they named me Misha. And we traveled all the way—well, we were in California. We were in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, Portland. Then we were in Kansas City. We were in Texas. We were all over the country for a solid year.

LEVINE: Wow. What was it like for you, who liked to travel, to see—

NEU: Oh, it was great. It was great.

LEVINE: —the big wide country?

NEU: It was great. I loved it. Yeah, it was great.

LEVINE: That must have been quite an experience—

NEU: It was.

LEVINE: —that year.

NEU: It was a very big ex—a very great experience. I wouldn't give that up for anything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: But basically, I'm on a—I'm happy. I'm by myself but I'm happy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: I have my children. I have my grandchildren, my great grandchildren and wh—what more can you ask for?

LEVINE: It's true. Yeah.

NEU: Right?

LEVINE: So y—you have something to feel very satisfied about.

NEU: That's right. That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NEU: My life wasn't a complete waste. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Not at all. And it—it takes your generation to allow the later generations to have the kind of formal training and whatever—

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: —that—that you couldn't have.

NEU: That's right.

LEVINE: Yes.

NEU: That's right. My—my children are doing well and we've given them the opportunity to do well. They all graduated college and they're—

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: And I'm very close to my granddaughters, my grandchildren, very close to them.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm. And how about life now, at this age when you retired and not—

NEU: I'm not completely retired.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: I'm still working at the temple teaching.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: Yeah, teaching bar and bat mitzvahs. And I still work on the high holidays and I still work on Passover, and whenever the cantor is off I—I do the services at the temple.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when did you come to Florida from Chicago?

NEU: I came to Florida in 1950. I've been here 47 years.

LEVINE: You've seen some changes here, huh?

NEU: Yeah, yeah, 47 years.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was the—what was the impetus for you to come to Florida at that time?

NEU: Well, there was very good reason. I had hay fever very badly. My wife had hay fever. My children—my son had a very bad case of asthma. And I had been going to the doctor and getting shots and—but every time the hay fever season came I—every time I—I sneezed my arms would just feel numb. So finally, it got to the point where I went to the doctor and I said, "What—what"—I said, "What can we do to get away from this?" He said, "Well, you move to Arizona or Florida." So it happened that I had a cousin that lived in Daytona Beach. And they said, "Come on down and we'll see that you get settled here," and so forth. So finally, we packed up and—and left, went to Daytona. We stayed there three years and things weren't too good there, despite of what my cousin said. So then the rabbi from the temple that I was—I was cantor. I was then being cantor at—in

Daytona. And the rabbi in Daytona said he was leaving. He was coming down to North Miami, to a temple in North Miami. And after he was here for almost a year, he called. He said, "We need a cantor here. Why don't you come down?" Cant—at that time, the cantor didn't pay very much, you know. They needed a cantor. So—and I was—I had a job that I wasn't too happy with so I said, "Let's go." So in '53, we moved down to North Miami and I got a job in a—in a haberdashery, a men's wear store, because the temple couldn't pay a lot of money. It was just—and I got a job in a haberdashery. I worked there for five years. Then I went into the insurance business, to supplement.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: I had to get another job to supplement what they were paying cantors at that time. And I stayed in the insurance business for 17 years.

LEVINE: Wow.

NEU: Yeah. And then I took a fulltime job in the temple.

LEVINE: Hmm. So you ended your work career as a full time cantor.

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Being able to—

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: —support yourself on the—

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: —[unclear].

NEU: Right, right.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

NEU: The insurance business, of course, helped. I got—I retired from that and got a pension from that. And one of the highlights of being a cantor was back in '89, I think it was, I was retired—I was retiring from the temple as a fulltime cantor. They wanted to hire a younger man. So the head of the—of the United Synagogue came over to me, who was a friend of mine (he was a member of my temple) came over to me. He said, "How would you like to go to Barbados?" I said, "Well, where's Barbados? What's Barbados?" He said, "They need somebody over there and they're willing

to pay pretty good.” So I said, “Well.” I said, “They’ll pay my way there. I’ll—I’ll go and try out, you know, see if they like me or if I like them. And I’ll think about it.” So I—they got me tickets and I went to Barbados and they greeted me with open arms. And I came back and I said, “Okay, I’m going to take the job.” And it paid excellent. It paid very well. So I went there and stayed for a year. I taught—I taught some children. I had about 15 children and did services Friday night and Saturday and the holidays. And then—then I came back.

LEVINE: Huh. Nice.

NEU: Yeah, it was a very good experience.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about heroes in your life? Do you—did—have there been any particular heroes? People you looked up to or wanted to emulate or—

NEU: Hmm.

LEVINE: Either personal or—

NEU: I—some of my greatest heroes were great cantors.

LEVINE: Oh.

NEU: Great cantors.

LEVINE: Who—who were they?

NEU: Well, like, I—I sang with several of them, like Rosenblatt [PH] and Clarken [PH] and, of course, Joshua Lind, who was my teacher, was a great cantor. He taught me everything I know, actually. And I used all his music for my choir. I had a choir at the temple all the time. And other than that, athletics. Some of the top baseball players, football players are my heroes. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: I’m a great sport fan.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NEU: And [unclear]—

LEVINE: Do you happen—do you have to have any recordings of you—of your cantor—

NEU: I have—I have some tapes. I have a couple of tapes. In fact, I used to run concerts when I was cantor at this temple here. I used to run concerts every year and I'd invite named cantors from New York, from Canada to come and—and sing in these concerts, of course. And I used— participate in those concerts also. And one year I had a concert that I had my whole family, just my family, because my family was very talented.

LEVINE: Really? What—[unclear]—

NEU: My son—my son has a beautiful baritone voice. He's a choir director besides being an attorney. My daughter has a gorgeous voice. She did a lot of singing in New York, what do you call, when somebody would make a recording, you know, she'd back—background singing. And my other son didn't have too much of a voice but he was musical. Then my granddaughters, two of my granddaughters—one was—they were both great pianists and they both played clarinet and flute. And—and then my wife—this was my second wife—was a pianist also so she played piano for us. And we gave a concert and they still talk about the concert that we gave—

LEVINE: Wow.

NEU: —at the—

LEVINE: You gave that concert here?

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: In Florida?

NEU: At Beth Israel here, mm-hmm.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

NEU: And that was one of the highlights of—

LEVINE: Yeah, not too many people could say that they—

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: —have done that [unclear].

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, your second wife, what was her—is her name or—and maiden name?

NEU: Her name was Estelle Wallace.

LEVINE: And you—you had had your children. You didn't [unclear]—

NEU: Oh, no. Yeah, of course.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NEU: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. [clears throat] Let's see. Is there anything else that maybe we hadn't—haven't touched on that you can think of that pertains to coming to this country and—

NEU: Well—

LEVINE: —what the ramifications of that—

NEU: No. I remember—I remember when we got—and when we got to New York we didn't even stay in New York. We got—we got on the train and went right to Chicago. And I remember getting to Chicago and we went to Division Street. Of course, this was all brand new to me. You know, it was wonderful. And I enjoyed—I enjoyed school, grammar school and high school, as much of it as I did have. And other than that—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NEU: If you could—too bad you couldn't interview my sister because she—I think—she discussed more of what happened than I did. I was too involved with sports and everything else. But she, with my—with my aunts and uncles, she probably remember—you know, from them telling her—

LEVINE: Them telling her, uh-huh.

NEU: —she remembered a lot more than I would.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, this is Binnie [PH], right?

NEU: Yeah.

LEVINE: Shackran [PH]. And hopefully, we'll get a chance to interview her.

NEU: I hope so.

LEVINE: And then the whole family [unclear].

NEU: I hope so. Yeah, yeah. Sure, she'll love that. She will.

LEVINE: Now, how was it that you came to visit Ellis Island and filled out this questionnaire?

NEU: Well, I—I went down—I've been at Ellis Island twice. But the last time I was in New York visiting with my daughter and we decided one day to go out to Ellis—oh, she and my son made connections to get our names on the—on the—

LEVINE: Wall of Honor.

NEU: —wall, yeah, for my sister and myself. She origina—originated it and she suggested it and my son went along with her. And that's—and so when I was in New York the last time she said, "Your name is on the wall. Do you want to go out and see it?" So I said, "Sure." So we went out and I took some pictures. But our names had not been put on the wall yet at that time. Then about a year later they—she call—they called me or she called me. She said that the names were—oh, somebody—one of my cousins had been on the—on—on the Ellis Island and said that they saw the names on the wall.

LEVINE: Oh, so you know they'll be there when you go next time.

NEU: Right, right.

LEVINE: Okay. Does that have a—a real significance to you?

NEU: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And I—I know it does to my sister. She—sure.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you for a most interesting—

NEU: It's my pleasure.

LEVINE: —story of your life.

NEU: My pleasure. I wish I could have been more—[chuckles] more, you know—

LEVINE: This is perfect.

NEU: Well, good.

LEVINE: Believe me. It—it is. And I want to thank you. I've been speaking with [clears throat] Maurice Neu, who came from Poland in 1922 at the age of eight. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]