

EI-92

DR. CLARA SAN ROSENBERG

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 1912

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 1991

RUNNING TIME: 49:04

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: BRIAN FEENEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: FLUSHING, NY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TODD SISLEY, 6/1993

AND BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 7/1996

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 8/1993

POLAND, 1920

AGE 8

SHIP: KROONLAND

PORT: ROTTERDAM

RESIDENCES:

●**POLAND: DUKLA**

●**US: NEW YORK, NY**

LEVINE: This Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's Thursday, September 19th, and I'm here with Dr. Clara Rosenberg on her seventy-sixth birthday.

ROSENBERG: Seventy-ninth!

LEVINE: Seventy-ninth. Excuse me. Seventy-ninth birthday. Dr. Rosenberg came from Poland in 1920 at the age of eight and we're here today in Flushing, New York at Dr. Rosenberg's home. So very happy to be here.

ROSENBERG: I'm very happy to have you.

LEVINE: Thank you. I'd like to start by asking you your birth date.

ROSENBERG: September 19, 1912.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

ROSENBERG: I was born in Poland.

LEVINE: In the town? ROSENBERG: In the small town called Dukla. D-U-, D as in Dora, U-K-L-A.

LEVINE: Okay. And that was a small town?

ROSENBERG: Very small.

LEVINE: Can you describe it?

ROSENBERG: it was--

LEVINE: Will you describe the town?

ROSENBERG: Well, I was six months old when I left the town so I can describe the town that I went to and lived for seven and a half years.

LEVINE: Okay. What town was that?

ROSENBERG: That was Besko. B-E-S-K-O. That was a one horse town without a horse. There were many farmers all around and there were only about three or four Jewish families and we all lived near the San River, S-A-N, which is still on the map. It's the southeastern part of Poland.

LEVINE: So it was a farming community?

ROSENBERG: It was a farming community, yes.

LEVINE: And where did you live? Can you describe the house?

LEVINE: And what did your family consist of when you lived there? I mean who were the members? Your mother, our father?

ROSENBERG :We lived in a small hut. It was really a two-room hit, but I--the room that had a ladder leading up to the attic was like a storage room. So there was just a kitchen and one bedroom/living room and the storage room and the attic.

ROSENBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: What were their names?

ROSENBERG: Well, my father, when I was six months, decided to run away from the Polish Army, which was very oppressive. He got together with a friend of his and he just escaped. And my mother reported him missing in action and the Polish government gave her a little pension. He was missing in action. We didn't say why. She went to, she lived in one room with another man and woman. There were two couples and they both had a

child, both couples had a child. And the six people not only lived in the one room in Dukla but my father earned his living there. He was quite a good craftsman, a shoemaker which Jews were permitted to do because the Gentiles didn't, consider that a very menial job. He would buy a strip of leather, take a person's measurement and sew a pair of boots. Boot, 'till the knee, by hand. And he had a few tools, of course. And when he ran away, a strange thing happened. He still had a few unfinished orders. So, my mother continued and finished all the orders and the people who got the boots never knew that my mother put the boots together. Anyhow, my mother decided, she was lonely, and she decided to visit my father's mother in Besko. So, she took a tablecloth or a bed sheet and put a few items in and put me on her arm and we rented a wagon and we went to Besko. We were there about a week when a wagon came with another big bundle. It seems that room burnt down. And so the neighbors very nicely rescued whatever they could and put it into another bed sheet and sent it on to us. The interesting, the one interesting tale my mother told me was that in order for the, after the two men were gone, both men ran away, that was my father's friend. Both ran away to America.

LEVINE: The one that shared the little house.

ROSENBERG: Yes. So that my mother and this woman left with the two children. To amuse themselves, they would exchange babies so that I would nurse at this woman's breast (she laughs) and the other child nursed at my mother's breast. Anyhow, when we got to Besko, at my father's mother, there was also three, three of my little cousins. It seemed that my father's brother was drafted and his wife, who became pregnant for a fourth time, with a coat hanger induced a miscarriage by hemorrhage and died and left three little girls. They were two, three, and four years old.

LEVINE: That's when you were six months.

ROSENBERG: When I was six months old. And so my mother was in a position where she had to support herself, my grandmother, my grandfather had died before I was born. My mother supported me, herself, my grandmother and three little girls. Six women she had to support!

LEVINE: And what did she do to support them?

ROSENBERG: Well, she had a very tiny pension from the Polish government. So she went to neighboring town, Krakow, everyone knows Krakow, and she bought a little machine that twirled, made cigarettes. You know, you put paper and tobacco in. And because it was already World War One, and there were many soldiers in our little town, quartered in the town and, you know, people wore, women wore long skirts then. So she wore a skirt with a big hem and out tobacco inside the hem all around because you were not allowed to transport tobacco. That was--what do they call that? When you're not allowed to transport something?

LEVINE:; I'm not sure.

FEENEY: (also present) Contraband.

ROSENBERG: What?

SIGRIST: (also present) Contraband.

ROSENBERG: Contraband. It was contraband. So she figured out she's going to put

tobacco all around her big, she had a big hem about that big (she gestures), all around her skirt and it was a very full skirt, so she had a lot of room and sure enough she got caught on the train. An officer, an official came over and said, "Lady, you stink from tobacco. Do you have any tobacco on you?" She said, "Feel me, I have nothing." She said, "If you look around, everybody is smoking. That's why everybody stinks of tobacco." And it sounded logical to him and he left. (She laughs.) She really could have been arrested and jailed. Anyhow she came home and made all these cigarettes with these little machines, sold it to the soldiers and she had plenty of money to support the six of us.

LEVINE: Now did you, when you were living in this town--Besko, did you go to school there? Did you start school?

ROSENBERG: Yes, by the time I became six years old there were no public schools. It was a school run by the Catholic church. I was the only Jewish child, of course. Although I knew all the prayers, I was excused from saying them. I didn't have to kneel and I didn't have to say the prayers. And it seems I was a very good student because every time there was a prize for academic excellence I would get it. My prizes were picture postcards. And the teacher was a nun, a Catholic nun, and she apparently was not anti-Semitic because otherwise I would not have gotten the prizes. And I was treated very nice.

LEVINE: Will you describe the school? What was it like?

ROSENBERG: It was a one room schoolhouse, children of all ages. And the nun, of course, wore the old Polish, you know, down to, black down to the ground with white starched headdress of some sort. And she was very gentle and

very sweet, and I enjoyed going to school. I went to school for a whole year. I spoke Polish and Russian fluently and, of course, at home my mother taught me Yiddish and Hebrew and some German that she knew. So I had a good education.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family? Did you practice the Jewish religion?

ROSENBERG: Well there were no synagogue in the neighborhood. If you had to go to a synagogue, you had to go to a big city. So, as far as I know, we were kosher, but who saw meat? Maybe once, once every two or three months. We lived on vegetables and, you know, lots of beans; the local products. You couldn't afford meat anyway and if we had it, it was just for the big holidays.

LEVINE: I see. So you did observe the holidays. Were there a little community of other Jewish people?

ROSENBERG: We only had about three or four Jewish families and we were close because we were all relatives. All our names were the same--San; named after the river. We all lived by the river. And I had many friends, little Gentile friends. I remember some negative things, of course. I remember some positive things.

LEVINE: Like what kinds of things do you remember?

ROSENBERG: Well, a nice positive--one of our neighbors built a swing. It was like a little box. It was a little box and I liked to go on there after the rain because then I never wore underwear so it felt very good to be bathed by the cold rain water. And we used to take turns. I also remember some negative

incidents. We had an outhouse, naturally, and by the way, part of our income was from selling the human waste to farmer's so that the human waste was right, you know, a few feet away from the house. Anyhow, we didn't have a window in the outhouse, just an open spot, an open place and every time I'd go in the bathroom, the bathroom, to the outhouse, if any of my friends wanted vengeance, they would throw a rock through the open space and, of course, one landed on my head. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Can you remember any games that you used to play as a child?

ROSENBERG: Well, I used to own toys from clay and sticks and I would create table and chairs and little bowls, and for a doll, my mother would take a rag and wind it around and make it look as though it had a head and a body. That was my doll. But I really, we had a railroad running through the edge of town and I would walk along the railroad because people would throw out boxes, you know, from Cracker Jacks, candy; those were delightful toys. I brought home all the boxes. Sometimes if I was lucky, they would throw out a broken plate. (She laughs.) And those were my toys.

LEVINE: And then you would make things out of them? Or you just played with them as they were?

ROSENBERG: I would play with the boxes as they were. But the toys themselves I made out of clay and sticks as a foundation.

LEVINE: Like what would you do with the boxes? Just Playing with them?

ROSENBERG: Just, just--

LEVINE: To collect them and have them?

ROSENBERG: Just collected them and have them and share them. I shared them with my friends. You know, I got them for nothing.

LEVINE: Right. Now, when you were living with your grandmother and--

ROSENBERG: Three little cousins.

LEVINE: Three cousins, your mother and you, what was the house like there? Was that--

ROSENBERG: Well, that was the house I described.

LEVINE: That was the two rooms with the attic. Okay. Uh-huh.

ROSENBERG: The two rooms with the storage room and the attic.

LEVINE: Okay, so it was cramped. It was small for the number of people.

ROSENBERG: Well, I thought it was a big house when I lived there. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: And did you have animals? Did you have any kind of--

ROSENBERG: No. We didn't have animals. But I remember we had a beautiful plum tree and my mother would send me up to the top of the tree and shake it like mad and she would collect all the plums underneath and make jam, plum jam that we had, you know, with bread. Of course, she baked her own bread.

LEVINE: Was she a good cook, your mother?

ROSENBERG: Uh.

LEVINE: So-so. (She laughs.)

ROSENBERG: So-so.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that when you think of your childhood in Poland that comes to your mind? Anything else you can think of?

ROSENBERG: (to her husband) What, honey?

MR.

ROSENBERG: Tell them how your neighbors protected you and the family from the Germans.

ROSENBERG: Oh yes. Yes. When bombs were being thrown down and they appeared on the first page of the New York Times, it was quite a battle. We had one neighbor who had a bomb-proof cellar and she invited all six of us into the cellar. And I remember she gave me the same treatment that she gave her own children. She gave us a piece of crust of bread and she said, and my mother said to me, "Now remember, this has to last you a few days. You're not allowed to eat. You must only suck on it." So that's what I did and sure enough we were in that cellar for, at least two days. And that's all I had was this crust of bread that I sucked. But we survived.

LEVINE: And what was it like being--

ROSENBERG: The important thing was that I never felt any anti-Semitism in the town I lived in. And my mother was very much loved. She was very friendly and she shared whatever she could with people, you know, plums and other vegetables that we grew. Potatoes and onions especially we grew in the back, you know, around the house.

LEVINE: What was your mother's maiden name? What was her full name?

ROSENBERG: Her name was Lena Durst. D-U-R-S-T was her maiden name.

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

ROSENBERG: Max, Mordche. That's the Hebrew name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How do you spell the Hebrew name?

ROSENBERG: M-R, M-O-R, I guess, D-C-H-E. Mordche.

LEVINE: Um, okay. So, uh, then how was it decided that you would be coming to America?

ROSENBERG: Oh, well, my father was very lonely without us and he wanted to rescue us. So he sent passports to uh, for my mother, me and for his mother. The three little girls in the meantime, uh, by the time the war was over, they went back with their father who remarried. So there were just three passports for us. But my grandmother didn't want to come. She said she's not going to leave that little house, the little hut she had. And she was, she was very foolish, I think, because she lost her life in the

Holocaust.

LEVINE: Um-hum. Getting back to the shelling and the incident and the shelling.

ROSENBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: What, what, did you experience instances of that kind of thing on other occasions? When you came out of the shelter, what had been done in the town? Was there damage?

ROSENBERG: Well, there was damage to certain houses but our house was not touched, luckily.

LEVINE: And were there other instances where you had to go for shelter?

ROSENBERG: No. This is the only one I remember. And I remember, you know, how kind they were and how well they treated us.

LEVINE: When you got the passports then to leave, can you remember packing? Can you remember what your mother wanted to take?

ROSENBERG: Well, my mother baked what is called a "ruggalah." It's a little cake that withstands temperature and time and you could, you could--that's the only food we took along on our journey to the boat to come here. So she baked enough for several months. And that's all we ate were these "ruggalah."

LEVINE: Because you didn't want to eat the food on the ship?

ROSENBERG: No, no. 'till the boat.

LEVINE: Oh, 'till you got to the boat.

ROSENBERG: "Till we got to the boat.

LEVINE: Well, what was the journey like?

ROSENBERG: Well, we went by wagon but mostly by railroad and we used to, we had to make railroad schedules. So, very often, we got up at three, four in the morning and to this day getting up early, to me, is such a happy occasion. It means I'm going to a land of joy and I'm still an early riser. But I could get up at any time and be fresh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was it a long trip then?

ROSENBERG: It took several weeks to get from Poland to the Netherlands. We had to go through several countries all across Poland because we were in the southeast corner, all across Germany and then the Netherlands. I don't remember what other countries we went through.

LEVINE: Was there, did people of the town get together to say goodbye? Do you remember actually leaving?

ROSENBERG: Yes, yes. We were all, my mother had a big white sheet where she put everything in, including the "ruggalah," and sewed, sewed it up. And then, she also cut my hair. I had hair down to my buttocks. I had long blonde hair like all the other Polish children. You couldn't, blue eyes, you couldn't tell the difference between me and the other kids. So she cut off this long

braid and put it in and on the way we lost it, because every time we got to an important place, there were two reasons why she had to undo this package. One, there were people, officials who wanted to make sure we're not carrying contraband. And number two, every time we wanted something, if we had to change our clothing or if we wanted to eat one of those 'ruggalah," she had to dip and get it. So my braid was lost on the way.

LEVINE: Now, what was the reason that she cut your hair off before the trip?

ROSENBERG: Well, because it would have been too difficult to, there was no place to wash the hair and so on and uh, she thought that would be more comfortable. And it was more comfortable.

LEVINE: Okay, so it was several weeks then, by the time you got to the Netherlands and to the ship.

ROSENBERG: Right. Sure.

LEVINE: And what was the name of the ship?

ROSENBERG: The Crown Land. "Kroonland."

LEVINE: And did you stay, where did it leave from? What port?

ROSENBERG: From Rotterdam.

LEVINE: From Rotterdam. Did you stay in Rotterdam for any length of time?

ROSENBERG: No. I think we just made it to the ship.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then what was it like on board? What do you remember about the passage?

ROSENBERG: On board it was jammed. Every, there was hardly any place to walk or to stand wherever we went. Of course, I was in steerage and that was, in a way, nice. My mother dressed me in a little blue and white sailor's suit. And when I go out on deck, the people in the upper class must have thought I was cute. They threw candy down to me and it was nice. I enjoyed that.

LEVINE: And was it a long trip? Do you remember how long?

ROSENBERG: It was twelve days on the ship and it was, first of all, I was seasick and they, luckily they put us on the top tier. There were three tiers and I remember vomiting. I tried to vomit, you know, not in bed, but down and, I hope I didn't vomit on anybody's head.

LEVINE: But there was lot of that going on.

ROSENBERG: Yes. Yes. And the odor was horrible, as you can imagine.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about the food aboard the ship?

ROSENBERG: I don't remember the food. I guess it was okay. But who could eat if you're seasick? But I was very lucky, because there was another family with us from the town where the child got measles and they would give them a bath and they would die. The kid was thrown overboard. And I got

a rash, the first, measles rash the first day I landed in New York. So I was very, very lucky. If I had gotten a rash a few hours before, it would have been just too bad.

LEVINE: Well, you would have been detained at Ellis Island.

ROSENBERG: Yes. They had a hospital there.

LEVINE: So is there anything else? Did you play with other children on board the ship or anything else you remember about that voyage?

ROSENBERG: Yes. There was one time when the fog horn sounded. And there was great danger of our sinking because the deck was full of water. Excuse me. And, of course, my mother stood in the corner of the deck saying her Hebrew prayers. There were special prayers; the boat shouldn't sink and we should be saved. And, but before long, probably a half hour or an hour another rescue ship came along and took most of our baggage off the boat and I guess that made the boat lighter. And all around there were huge, I don't know whether they were sharks or whales. You know, they were ready for the kill. And that was really frightening; to see all--but they disappeared and the boat kept going. The ship kept going.

LEVINE: So everybody must have been very relieved when you saw the New York harbor.

ROSENBERG: Oh, very much.

LEVINE: Do you remember that? Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time?

ROSENBERG: No, I don't remember seeing it.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing New York?

ROSENBERG: Yes, all those big buildings. It was--

LEVINE: Can you remember your impression as a child?

ROSENBERG: It looked like a toy; some toy that I had no access to. It didn't look real. You know, I had no idea what a city was like. I was really very ignorant.

LEVINE: Well, I guess the journey had been an eye-opener from the beginning, because you saw Rotterdam and--

ROSENBERG: The journey was mostly railroads. All I remember was lot's and lot's of railroads and sitting in smoke-filled rooms, you know, in the railroads.

LEVINE: And then, what was your impression of Ellis Island when you approached that?

ROSENBERG: Well, I was very happy to be there although it was jammed; more jammed than the boat. And my father had to come back a second day because they didn't reach his number the first day. And I remember he brought some pears for us to eat. That was my first taste of American food. That was nice.

LEVINE: And do you recall when you saw your father for the first time?

ROSENBERG: When I saw my father I said, "That is not my father!" I was very upset.

LEVINE: Why did you say that?

ROSENBERG: Because I had visions of somebody on a white horse I guess. (She laughs.) I had, and yet I had a picture of him that he sent us to make sure that I would recognize him. But still, the internal image I had was radically different.

LEVINE: Will you describe your father, what he looked like when you saw him coming?

ROSENBERG: Yes. Well, he's short, about five-foot four, five-five, dark skinned with very, very blue eyes and black hair and I just wouldn't ex--it didn't jibe with my pre-conceived notions of what my father should look like. Of course, I don't remember him. I was only six months old when he left.

LEVINE: Right, right. Well, what was it like at Ellis Island then, for that day that you were there before you were processed?

ROSENBERG: Well, I waited and waited and people were milling all around and they were calling out to each other and it was, it was very noisy, noisy, overcrowded place. I clung to my mother's skirts and to the bundle I had.

LEVINE: Oh, you had the bundle.

ROSENBERG: Well, a huge bundle about this big. (She gestures.)

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

ROSENBERG: with our things.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your mother told you about America?
About what to expect or--

ROSENBERG: No. But I remember after we were here a very short while, only about two weeks, my mother said, "There are two things about America I don't understand. What does it mean when everybody says, 'Let's have fun?'" And the other thing she said, "America id full of 'Hurry up!' Everybody says, "Hurry up." (She laughs.) She couldn't understand that. Life was so slow in Poland, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

ROSENBERG: Leisurely.

LEVINE: So you slept overnight at Ellis Island then your first night.

ROSENBERG: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember the sleeping arrangements, what that was like?

ROSENBERG: No. No, I don't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And is there anything else that you remember from that place?
From Ellis Island.

ROSENBERG: Well, it was, it was very plain. There were wooden floors, I remember,

which I had never seen before. But everything around me was new that I had never seen.

LEVINE: You mean you were used to earthen floors?

ROSENBERG: Earthen floors. Sure. Every morning, my mother would get up a little earlier and take some clay and smooth out the floor before I got out of bed because the earth worms would come up during the night. I guess looking for food or air and so she made it comfortable for my grandmother and me and the other little children to get up.

LEVINE: Well the, when your father--you did unite with your father and come into New York--where did you go then?

ROSENBERG: He had rented an apartment on Broome Street in Manhattan, three flights up. It was a cold water flat with running water. Oh, that running water I thought was a miracle. Imagine, running water, I didn't have to go to a well with a bucket. (She chuckles.) And they had--

LEVINE: And what else was surprising?

ROSENBERG: --it had a rusty sink. It was years before the sinks became enameled.

LEVINE: Oh.

ROSENBERG: And I remember the first time my mother asked me to wash some dishes. So I went on a chair, took off my shoes, went into the sink with my feet and began washing dishes. I let the water--why should the water be wasted? So I--my feet were washed at the same time. (They laugh.)

LEVINE: And so was this now one of the sort of, tenement buildings on the Lower East Side?

ROSENBERG: A tenement building, yes, with a toilet in the hall shared by about, at least four families. And that was good because there were other tenements where their toilet was on the outside--outhouses. So, and we only had cold water, of course, and no heat. It was a cold winter, cold flat.

LEVINE: And then was your father working at that time?

ROSENBERG: No. He was out of work for a whole year. It was the depression. 1920 was a depression year and I remember what I went to school and when I come home from school, my mother treated me to a penny roll and a penny for a pickle. So, it was two cents and my father would say, "I can understand her eating the roll, but does she need the pickle, too?" He, you know, every penny counted.

LEVINE: Well, did your mother work then at that time?

ROSENBERG: No. She didn't work. He had about a thousand dollars saved up and we lived on that--

LEVINE: I see.

ROSENBERG: until, then we bought a grocery store. She was able to borrow some more money from another friend and we bought a grocery store.

LEVINE: In the Lower East Side?

ROSENBERG: Yeah, 9th Street.

LEVINE: And what was school like? Can you remember your first days in school?

ROSENBERG: Oh! My father was teaching me English. He would run and he'd say, "Catch me! Catch me!" (She laughs.) Or if he'd see a dog run by, "That's a dok." (She laughs.) Horrible pronunciation! I had to learn, but at least I got some fundamental. He was, my father was very nice to me. When I came into the apartment, he had a doll, a real doll all ready and a little carriage and a little piano, you know, a little toy piano all ready for me. And I, that doll had an open mouth and it was made of clay so I fed it what I ate every morning and after a few weeks, lo and behold, the clay doll had dissolved, it disappeared. (She laughs.) They don't make dolls out of clay anymore, I'm glad.

LEVINE: Well, they must have been wonderful toys for you.

ROSENBERG: Oh! Heavenly. Very nice.

LEVINE: So when you went to--

ROSENBERG: When I went to school, I knew a little bit of English 'cause my father taught me and, uh, so I was immediately drafted to walk around from class to class and tell the people when they go home, to wash their hair in kerosene because that kills the lice. A lot of kids, it seemed, came over with lice.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ROSENBERG: I was lucky. I didn't have any lice. I don't know how I avoided it. Yes?

MR

ROSENBERG: Tell them about the alphabet your mother devised.

MR

ROSENBERG: Oh no!

ROSENBERG: Yes! Tell them about it.

ROSENBERG: My mother taught me the Yiddish alphabet, which my husband likes, because in Hebrew, you know, Hebrew writing is without vowels, just consonants. So it's really very difficult to read unless you know what vowels are intended. So my mother taught me how to say the entire alphabet with different vowels underneath, like: (Recites alphabet in Yiddish.) (They laugh.) That's the whole Hebrew alphabet with an "A" (vowel). I could say it with every vowel, the same thing.

LEVINE: That's going to be fun translating. (They laugh.)

SIGRIST: It's all yours, Janet! (They laugh.)

LEVINE: Uh, let's see. So what was life like on the Lower East Side? Were the families there uh, mostly immigrants, were they--

ROSENBERG: Were all immigrants. We were all very friendly and our doors were open and within a few months, my father had also sent passports to his brother and his wife, who came from Hungary, and my father in his largess,

bought my mother, I remember, a beautiful suit for fifty dollars from a customer peddler who came to the door and my aunt a suit. And that same week, our apartment was robbed and both, only both suits were taken. So, it looked like the customer peddler must have told somebody and my mother never had a suit after that. She didn't want any!

LEVINE: It was a bad omen to have a suit.

ROSENBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what were your living quarters like there? How many rooms did you--

ROSENBERG: I had, we had three rooms there and my father, even though I was eight, bought me a crib instead of a bed. He thought that was appropriate. But pretty soon my uncle and aunt came from Hungary and they occupied the only bedroom we had and we slept in the living room and we had a kitchen with our rusty sink. And I remember it was three flights up and my mother would say, "Go downstairs and play with the children." And I didn't want to leave the house. I said, "No, I won't be able to count the steps coming up and I won't know where I belong." It was an excuse. But it was a problem. I really thought I had to count the number of steps in order to get back home again. And when I went downstairs, the children who discovered that I was a foreigner began making fun of me. They called me a "greenhorn" and a "mocky" and um--

LEVINE: Was it a mixed neighborhood with immigrants from all over?

ROSENBERG: It was a mixed neighborhood. Yes. But there were many natives. And it was the natives who made fun of me. So I decided I would solve that

problem by never talking another word of Polish or Russian. And I said to myself, " If I never talk another word of Polish, they won't know I'm Polish and they won't called me a 'mocky' or 'greenhorn.'" P.S., I stopped talking but they still continued making fun of me. It didn't work. And now I'm sorry because I was fluent in Polish and now I only remember a few phrases. For instance, when my mother would hit me, you know, she'd slap me on the buttocks. So in Polish there's a very cute saying. It said: "Dupa nie szklanka!" And the translation is "Ass is not glass." (She laughs.) So you could hit there.

LEVINE: Uh, let's see. What about your mother? What was her adjustment like? Can you remember what it was like for her early on?

ROSENBERG: Well, it was difficult for her because my father wasn't working and there was worry. How was she going to, you know, what is she going to do for the next meal? And she became pregnant and within two or three months, so she had that problem, where to live?

LEVINE: And then did she have the baby then?

ROSENBERG: Yes, she had the baby because we bought the grocery store and I was in charge of the baby while she was selling in the store learning English at the same time.

LEVINE: And uh, so is that then your--is it a boy or a girl?

ROSENBERG: It was a boy.

LEVINE: Is that your only sibling?

ROSENBERG: No, no. I have four, I had four siblings but two of them died.

LEVINE: And what were the names of, of--

ROSENBERG: Well, Harry was Harry San. He was an artist. I think he might have died from inhaling all the lead. He was an artist all his life, from the lead in the paint. And then my brother Abe died of cancer of the lung. He was a heavy smoker and when I'd say to him, "Don't smoke! You can get cancer of the lung," he said, "Somebody else will get cancer, not me." Of course, he died, cancer of the lung. I still have one brother, Chai and a sister, Rosalie.

LEVINE: And then, uh, your husband Jack. How, when did you meet him?

ROSENBERG: I took some, I did all my baccalaureate work at night in City College 'cause that was cheap and available and I met him, he was going home, I met him in the subway. So we call it an underground romance.

LEVINE: And you were studying psychology at that time?

ROSENBERG: No, no. They didn't even have a course called psychology at that time. At that time, all psych courses were called philosophy. It's only recently, in the last thirty or forty years that the word psychology has come into the curriculum.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, uh--

ROSENBERG: I studied education because that was a wide open field. They needed

teachers.

LEVINE: And then did you teach after that?

ROSENBERG: Yes. Yes. I taught for only about three years. I taught mathematics in junior high school and then in the elementary school I taught first and fourth grades. I also taught on the college level later on, after I got my Ph.D.

LEVINE: Well you had children then?

ROSENBERG: Yes. We have three sons.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

ROSENBERG: Allen, he's forty-nine, and Jay is forty-six, and Saul is forty. All in the computer field.

LEVINE: I see. And the you went back to work in your forties.

ROSENBERG: Well, I married before I got my baccalaureate. I had to continue, so I continued at night. Then I went for, had my children, then I went for my masters and then for my, I never stopped. I liked school so much I never stopped going.

LEVINE: Well, can you, before we close, is there anything that you would like to say about, uh, this life story? Of starting out in Poland and coming here and--

ROSENBERG: Well, I think it's a success story because I started out from a land that had

very, very little opportunity for Jews and less opportunity for women. Uh, I still remember a neighbor of mine whom I loved very much, who crossed her husband. He beat her so badly that she lay in bed for a year. And it was acceptable for a, you were, as a woman, you were your husband's chattel and if you dared cross him or for some other reason, he could beat you with impunity. Nobody said anything.

LEVINE: And you were aware of that as a young child.

ROSENBERG: As a young child I saw it and it hurt me. But otherwise, the people were like people. You know, good and bad.

LEVINE: So you have no regrets--

ROSENBERG: We did, we did a lot of trading, you know. My grandmother would give a bushel of potatoes and get a bushel of string beans or, an awful lot of trading. Exchanging really. Bartering. That's the word I want. And this was an entirely different world. But, being young, I adjusted to it very rapidly. I've always had many, many friends and, uh, just like I did in Poland. Everyone was worthwhile talking to and exploring. So--

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I thank you very much. It's been very interesting talking with you and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW