EI-949
JOSEPH WISHNER, M.D.
BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 28TH, 1897
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 24, 1997
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 100
RUNNING TIME: 50.10
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: Amy Torres and Vanessa Frith
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Some portions of the interview are hard to interpret as Mr. Wishner tends to mumble and cough frequently.

UKRAINE, 1901
AGE: 4

SHIP: NOT RECORDED
PORT: HAMBERG
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is September 24, 1997. I'm here in Manhattan with Joseph Wishner who was born –

WISHNER: Do you think they ought to add M.D.?

LEVINE: Ok, Joseph Wishner, M.D. Absolutely. Dr. Wishner was born Josel Wishnefsky in the Ukraine in a town a few miles from Kiev.

WISHNER: Named Kanev. K-A-N-E-V.

LEVINE: Ok, great. In 1901 at four years of age, Dr. Wishner came to this country. At the time of this interview he is 100 years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Ok, if you could say again, please, for the tape, your birthdate. [pause] Your birthdate.

WISHNER: I don't understand what you mean.

LEVINE: Your birthdate. The date you were born.

WISHNER: February 28th, 1897.

LEVINE: Ok, and do you have any memories of the Ukraine before you left?

WISHNER: No, none whatsoever. All I know is that I spoke Russian only when I got here and in a first time, naturally I lost it and started speaking English. But the family language, although they could speak English and Polish, my mother, Russian was the household conversation.

LEVINE: What was it like –

WISHNER: Every Jew spoke Russian. They knew Yiddish but they spoke Russian. I went in to get something, the reason we came here was that my grandfather in this family had come here about five years before.

LEVINE: Oh, and why did they come?

WISHNER: Well, I don't know, I didn't ask anybody. I came like everybody else that came here. For a better future or whatever it was, he had a pretty large family. He had six children, five daughters and one male. And my mother was rather close to her father so she couldn't stand being away from him and so she came here with my father and three children.

LEVINE: Mhmm. Now, you said your mother was from Poland?

WISHNER: No, I said she could speak Polish.

LEVINE: Oh, ok. Was your family in the Ukraine for quite awhile before they came to this country?

WISHNER: Yes, that's where they lived while they were in Russia.

LEVINE: I see. Did your mother and father grow up there as far you know?

WISHNER: I know she grew up there. My father didn't come from Kanev, he came from another town. I suppose this was an arranged marriage. My father, my mother, doing the custom in Russia.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

WISHNER: My mother? Rose.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

WISHNER: Leshinsky that was her father's name, Leshinsky which became Lesser when she came her. L-E-S-S-E-R.

LEVINE: Oh, uh huh, and how do you spell Leshinsky?

WISHNER: Well I don't know (stammers) A? L-A-S-H-I-N-S-K-Y. Or L-E-S-H— Leshinsky.

LEVINE: Uh huh and how did –

WISHNER: But they changed their name to Lesser, we got my name shortened from Wishnevsky to Wishner. I don't know who did that, could be immigration people did it or could be my family decided we didn't need such a long name so we changed. My grandfather having been here and knew the ropes and my uncle, my grandfather's one male, was able to help us get around and do things and sort the business and things of that nature.

LEVINE: I see. And how about your father? What was his name?

WISHNER: Jacob.

LEVINE: Jacob. And your grandfather, do you remember him?

WISHNER: I do, yes, yes. I was, I got [not understood] and met with him at all times.

LEVINE: What was his name?

WISHNER: Nathan Lesser.

LEVINE: I see. Now, let's see, did your mother and father ever tell you anything about coming here?

WISHNER: If they did, I've forgotten it. I remember some discussion about how bad things were on the boat, you know the boats and we were in steerage and the food was poor. I remember some talk about that but nothing, nothing concrete.

LEVINE: And anything about Ellis Island or anything about when you first arrived?

WISHNER: We had no contact with Ellis Island. They came by boat to Montreal. They came from Hamberg, that's where they embarked. There must have been some tourist agent in Russia that arranged these trips. And the boat went to Montreal and from Montreal we came to New York by train. Why they did that I don't know. Many people did that because they were afraid there were something that would keep them from passing. That was common practice in those days. I remember that because I was older and I heard talk but I don't know whether my parents did that or not. Everybody came in and we had no problems there were five people.

LEVINE: That was you and your mother and father –

WISHNER: And three -- well and two other children.

LEVINE: Was it a sister and brother or?

WISHNER: Yes, I was the first then the second was a sister then the third was a boy and the fourth was a sister. There was another baby born in 1906 when my mother was here.

LEVINE: So the whole family traveled together when you came?

WISHNER: Right, right.

LEVINE: And where did you go when you got to New York? Where did you stay?

WISHNER: Well there must have been somebody down on the East Side. My grandfather was in real estate and I think that he gave us a bit of help, he got us an apartment on the Lower East Side. I don't remember where or much about it. I was four or five, I should remember but I didn't. But I do remember we moved from there to East New York, Pennsylvania Avenue, a two family house. East New York at that time was very -- (pauses) words don't come to me as quickly as they – as they used to.

LEVINE: That's ok.

WISHNER: How can you take that out? Well I just, can you take that out?

LEVINE: Well we can't but it's ok. Everybody does it, it's a superlative –

WISHNER: Well we were living wide open and there were not much in apartment houses, the population was small. But I went to school there, I remember. And from there we moved up to the Bronx,

quite a jump. My mother was the fattest on milk and food so she moved where greener pastures were. We moved to the Bronx and we were very lucky because we found, she was very energetic. My mother was the active one in the family. She went to school, night school, to learn English in this country, yes. She could read and write Russian and she learned English quickly. And she was a fire and an active person so she found these living places for us. The place we lived in the Bronx alongside the Grand Concourse. And on the other side there was Clairmount Park. So we were beautifully situated – a small park that had tennis courts, they had places where we could play football, and the concourse, then there were no apartments on the concourse, it was virgin country!

LEVINE: About what year was that, Dr. Wishner? About what year was it that you moved?

WISHNER: Well I graduated public school in 1911. I think we must of moved there by 1908 or 9.

LEVINE: And can you describe it anymore, the community that you were a part of?

WISHNER: Yes! It was a one apartment house on the corner, walk up, no elevators but we had electricity, I guess we had a phone, I can't remember. It was a nice quiet neighborhood and we had the park right in front of us and we had, the street was a big broad street so there was a lot of play area. And the Grand Concourse was old at the time and [not understood]. It was nothing like today, nothing! So I went to school at Treemont Avenue in the Bronx. PS 28. And I graduated in 1911.

LEVINE: Were there many immigrant children in your school?

WISHNER: I don't remember any.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about learning the language?

WISHNER: No. I learned it like students in school learned it.

LEVINE: Uh huh. How about your mother and father, did they learn the language?

WISHNER: They learned the language, yes, my mother was pretty good in English and she went to high school and she read a lot. She read books and that helped out. My father could speak but not too good.

But he managed, he had a business of his own and he managed for some years until he got sick.

LEVINE: What kind of business did he go into?

WISHNER: The leather business, manufacturing razor straps. You know what a razor strap is? In those days, every barber has several razor straps that sharpened their razors. So he manufactured those and pocketbooks, small pocketbooks and later big, big bags and things of that nature.

LEVINE: Where was his business?

WISHNER: Well, 295 Church Street he had a little factory there.

LEVINE: Is that Brooklyn?

WISHNER: That's New York. Church Street is down by City Hall.

LEVINE: Oh, uh huh, uh huh.

WISHNER: He had a business there with two or three employees, a small business. And I used to go there Saturdays and bring him lunch. My mother's a good cook and she made delicious items.

LEVINE: Like what are some of the things that you can recall that were so delicious?

WISHNER: Well, a stew. She could make a stew that you thought was chocolate ice cream (laughs). And she could make knishes and things like that. She was a good cook all around, not French or anything, but just the whole cook. And we ate very well.

LEVINE: When your father was in the Ukraine did he do anything with leather or was that a new, what did he do before?

WISHNER: No, his family had a hardware store where they sold home improvements and all the things that go in hardware stores like paints and lumber. As family, he was working with the family. But when he came here, how he got into leather, I don't know but maybe there was some similarity to –

LEVINE: How – I'm sorry.

WISHNER: He was a very serious worker, my father. He wasn't, nobody messed with him and he wasn't very affectionate openly. And sure

everybody loved everybody else but there was no visible like in some families. I never sat in my mother's lap that I can remember. And we didn't kiss coming in going out the way you do now.

LEVINE: How was your father with you? How did your father act toward you and respond to you?

WISHNER: We were like brothers. But not often, he went away to work early in the morning and came home moderately late so we didn't have that much time together. But he took me shopping and bought me clothes and we went to Canal Street quite a number of times where we picked up nice clothing for little money. He was very tender and solicitous and they were proud of the children. The children all did well -- I became a doctor, my brother was an accountant, my sister graduated Hunter College and my other sister is a teacher, she graduated that [not understood] school or whatever it is for teachers. So the family was proud of us. And my mother was lively. She danced, she loved romping around, she loved playing cards and my father was quiet, he liked to play cards with men, poker or something like that.
So from East New York we moved to the Bronx. And I don't know how long we lived there, maybe 1914. I went to, when I graduated public school, I decided to go to Townsend Harris Hall. (coughs) Excuse me, it's part of the pill I swallowed. That was a public high school on the grounds of the City College. It was an experimental school, it was a three year curriculum and it was supposed to be for good students. You had to, I don't know if you took an exam to get in, but I got in. Whether I went there three years, I don't know, it was a mistake afterward, but I did it, I got in.

LEVINE: Why?

WISHNER: Well I had two series of courses, one was science and they took in chemistry and physiology and a lot of things. And the other was the liberal arts, languages and history and English composition and such things. So I took the liberal arts. And when I went to go to medical school, I didn't have the science!

LEVINE: Oh.

WISHNER: See I graduated the Townsend Harris in three years, 1914, and I didn't have the science requirements to get into medical school. It was one year pre-medicine in which you took these science courses and for four years of medical school. So I went to a private school on Treemont Avenue, they had, I suppose they have them now too, where they taught these courses and I took the

necessary courses and I passed so I was certified to get into medical school in 1915.

LEVINE: And what medical school did you go to?

WISHNER: So, Fordham University. (pauses, mumbles: This goddamn thing).

LEVINE: If we could backtrack for a minute, did you have a special position in the family because you were the oldest son?

WISHNER: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that position?

WISHNER: I was the darling in the family. My aunts and uncles and my cousins and my mother and father. I was the first grandchild and they treated me royally.

LEVINE: And how about, I imagine you learned English more quickly than your mother and father.

WISHNER: That's right.

LEVINE: Did that –

WISHNER: A child does, that is true.

LEVINE: Did you ever act as an intermediary with your mother and father because you knew English?

WISHNER: Maybe, I couldn't say I definitely – very likely I used to talk with them or discuss books or something.

LEVINE: Did they have the attitude that they wanted to become American?

WISHNER: Yes.

LEVINE: It, was that very –

WISHNER: Yes, that was their attitude.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

WISHNER: They were part of the environment and the politics and that's what they want.

LEVINE: How about their politics? Did they, were they politically inclined at all in this country?

WISHNER: Well, no not active, but they were Democrats. There are no politicians in our family. Not that I remember. We had doctors and lawyers but not politicians (laughing).

LEVINE: How about any other attitudes or values that your mother and father tried to pass along to you?

WISHNER: Well they always preached honesty and integrity -- old fashioned parents, you know. We were all good children, I got in one scrape with my father. I remember because I used a swear word. I don't know why I did it. And he was going to lick me – I never got licked, really, but my father was going to lick me he got so upset I said a bad word. I must have been about seven, eight, or nine and he chased me around the house and finally out of the house. But otherwise I never got licked, I was a good boy and if I was bad, my mother and I talked it over. There was a closer repoire with my mother than with my father.

LEVINE: How about religion? Did that play a part in your life, religion?

WISHNER: Well they were Jewish, no question, not very observant but they went to temple on the holy days and we observed Passover – beautiful setting. And Rosh Hashanah and the High Holy Days. But they didn't make a weekday visit to our synagogue. I was Bar Mitzvah'ed at fourteen years, and for years after that I put on the [not understood]. You know what the [not understood] are? [not understood] they're called in English. [not understood]. I read a book, sometimes, morning and night. And somedays I [not understood].

LEVINE: So you did that for a year?

WISHNER: And then I stopped. Most boys didn't do it. Many did, but most no. The Jewish graduate, he got away from Judiaism. But now I think they're coming back, anywhere there's an attempt made to bring you back and avoid these intermarriages and they're all upset about it. But you know more than 50% of Jewish marriages are arranged?

LEVINE: Really?

WISHNER: More than 50%. Well, sometimes they work and my daughter married a non-Jew but he knew more about the Jewish holidays

and these things Jewish than I did! He was a student who read a lot and a college boy, that's where they met, in college. So sometimes it works out alright. He was, they were a really lovely family so it made a difference so my daughter married this boy and she had four sons! Each one six foot tall (laughs). She is not tall. And two of her sons are married and they each have two children. So I have four grandsons and four great grandchildren!

LEVINE: Oh, well now tell me you went to medical school at Fordham.

WISHNER: 1915.

LEVINE: 1915, and then you graduated and then where did you go from there, after you graduated?

WISHNER: Well, I set up a practice.

LEVINE: And where was that?

WISHNER: In Harlem, 7th avenue and 112th street. I did general practice for a few years but I got associated with the hospital for joint disease, that's an orthopedic hospital because my wife worked there. I'll tell you a story, it's an exciting story, it's not pertinent to what we're doing.

LEVINE: Go ahead, let's put it on.

WISHNER: I told the story a lot of times but I enjoy telling it. In 1918, I was in medical school the third year, going into the fourth. There was a flu epidemic in the city and they became short of doctors so they took every fourth year medical student out of the medical school and put them in the hospital as an intern. So I got a position at Grove (ph) Hospital. That's on 35th Street and Lenox (ph) Avenue, in the middle of Harlem. So one day in November, my roommate and I went to a dance. My fraternity sponsored the dance. We had girls. When I was there I saw a young lady that attracted me right away and I asked her to dance and we danced. I got her name, but I didn't get telephone or address, I didn't know where she was. When I asked her to dance a second time she said no. I of course was offended because I (?). (Laughs). I wasn't the best. So we went home and I talked about that girl everyday. I did that for a couple of months, I didn't know where to find her. I didn't know where she lived, but I wanted to find her. So at the end of December, there was an awful lot of calls to joint diseases to come and pick up a patient. That hospital didn't admit medical cases. Harlem Hospital was the city hospital, bigger then Joint Diseases

which was usually a small hospital and only devoted to orthopedic problems. So they called for an ambulance to take a patient from there to Harlem. So I was elected to go with the ambulance. I went. Joint Disease was about ten blocks from Harlem Hospital. I walked into the dispensary area, where the patients gathered, there was this girl. She was secretary to a doctor at that hospital.

LEVINE: What was her name?

WISHNER: Rose.

LEVINE: And her last name?

WISHNER: Cohen. It was funny. I, uh, I always said that it was fate that it happened, I guess. So we started dating right away and I got married 1920.

LEVINE: What was Harlem like, when you first went to Harlem?

WISHNER: Well it – it-- was, uh, a very residential place. Uh, it was the next step up from- from -- poor neighborhoods. There were good apartment houses and, uh, nice shops and nice people.

LEVINE: So in other words the lower eastside-

WISHNER: There were no colored people in Harlem, in my part of Harlem, the only part of Harlem at that time (laughs). 112th Street and 7th Avenue. That was a step up for Jews. You went maybe from Bronx or Washington Heights to 7th Avenue. The next step was to West End Avenue. That's the step that I took.

LEVINE: Where did the Lower East Side fit in to the hierarchy? The Lower East Side?

WISHNER: I don't remember to much association.

LEVINE: But that would have been sort of the low rung of the ladder?

WISHENER: Well it depends where we moved in when we first came. I don't remember anything of it. Sorry.

LEVINE: What about, uh, is there anything else like that? That's so interesting, about the steps that people moved--

WISHNER: mmmm

LEVINE: -- as part of their mobility. Was there anything else about the Jewish people coming to this country that you might have noticed? Any trends, or any kind of-

WISHNER: No. There was certainly a big trend and that's historic. There was, at that time, the end of the 1800's beginning of 1900's, there was a large group of Jews I think, in this country, yeah. (Pauses) From all over Europe and other places too. We have evidence of it now; we have immigrants from all over and more then we can take care of.

LEVINE: Would you have any advice for immigrants coming in now, based on your own experience?

WISHNER: No, I wouldn't have any special advice. Most of them come and they have somebody here that they know who can start them off on something. Some of them do well. You read about some of the millionaires today who came here in the twenties and in a short period they became millionaires. Quite a number of them have, and they didn't have to have (?). So I have nothing against immigrants, but of course we don't let them bring some of the West Indian people come here and cause trouble. But now it seems Porter Ricans don't bother us, Asian's don't bother us, they have their own trouble in their country but I don't think they bother us. Most people agree that immigrants are what make this country great because they are such a wide variety of people, scientists, doctors, and lawyers. I have five doctors in my family and six or seven lawyers.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE. BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE.

LEVINE: Do you think there is something about the immigrant experience that has an effect on the kind of person. In other words, do you think coming to a new country has a big impact on the personality of the person?

WISHNER: I think so, yes.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about that? How it might work, what kind of influence it might have?

WISHNER: I don't know how to tie that up, or tie that in. (Coughs) Sorry.

LEVINE: That's okay. Would you like some water?

WISHNER: No. Not to say if you would get me some medicine. Or else I'll have to wait till I go out for it.

LEVINE: Oh. Would you like to pause here?

WISHNER: No. What time is it?

LEVINE: Its twenty- five of. We have about fifteen more minutes.

WISHNER: That's okay, I'll suffer for the mean time. Is that going to be in it?

LEVINE: We never edit. We let it go and people take what they want from it and that's the way it is.

WISHNER: oh.

Levine: Okay.

WISHNER: We were we? With medicine? That was my hobby and my 9?) and I worked hard.

LEVINE: What was it that you liked about medicine? What was it that attracted you to studying it?

WISHNER: Well I cant name any particular thing. I think there was a certain status, uh, doctor. More so then now. Not to many doctors now I guess. And, uh, they didn't make money like they do today, so it wasn't the money. I wasn't that kind of a man anyway. I, ah, liked the idea of service to people who needed it and I did a lot a free work. I would say half of my day was spent doing free work at the different hospitals. And we didn't get paid in those days. Today residents get thousands of dollars. We got twenty dollars a month and if you came late, they deducted five dollars. (Laughs). There was a system.

LEVINE: Now, after you were a resident, then you opened a private practice?

WISHNER: Yes. After I got married I opened. My father decided that now that your married you better go into practice right away instead of coming to live home and opening up an office some time later. So we had the pleasure of looking for an apartment and we found an apartment. Those days they had these so called railroad flats and there was six or seven rooms and there was a waiting room in the first room, then the doctors consulting room, then the doctors

examining room. That was two. Then there was four rooms. A bedroom for the people who lived in there, so you had a doctors office in your apartment.

LEVINE: Where was that?

WISHNER: Oh. 112th street and 7th Avenue. And my wife was able to help, she worked the door and be present if I needed a nurse or something. She had worked in the hospital for a long time so she was acquainted with that type of activity. That's where I lived and later I got, uh, spit out. West End Avenue -- that was the next spot. And 93rd Street.

LEVINE: And did you have a practice there?

WISHNER: Yeah. I settled. I fixed up the apartment so that the apartment was an office and the apartment was living quarters. So I had only one rent to pay instead of two. And I had enough room for beginning a specialty practice. And after ten years there I moved to West End Avenue lower down. It was a better neighborhood. It was a new apartment and, uh, just better. You know? I moved down there and had a beautifully office. Six rooms and each one was about twenty-five feet by twenty feet. Six rooms for a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. That was a time of depression in the real estate business. I stayed in that office forty-five years. Two Seventy-seven West End Avenue. Nice office and I had help, as was necessary for an orthopedic practice. And I had a hospital affiliation where I operated and visited poor patients in their wards and private patients who paid you.

LEVINE: Do you know why you specialized in orthopedics?

WISHNER: Yes. My wife worked for the orthopedic doctor. So after we got married, the thing happened so naturally he gave me a job in the hospital. So that's why I got this sort of perceptive shape, I began showing an interest in orthopedics and studying it and helping in the hospital and after a while I became myself a specialist.

LEVINE: You must have seen the medical profession change a lot.

WISHNER: Oh, tremendous, tremendous. Uh, a house call was two dollars in Harlem and office visit was one dollar. That didn't last long, it changed. After a while it became a little more expensive. But not like now. I'm not for what the doctors – I read in the paper, uh, the magazine the other day, the average income of a doctor now is

four hundred thousand dollars. Can you imagen four hundred thousand?

LEVINE: what were you making initially?

WISHNER: Fifty thousand.

LEVINE: Fifty thousand?

WISHNER: Not in the first year, naturally. When you begin you don't get anything. When I had the hospital through me you could get patients. Sometimes the people in the dispensary were free and after I examined them they decided they wanted to come to my office. So occasionally we got a patient that way. And, now I forgot what I was going to say, so-

LEVINE: We were talking about the difference between what doctors make today and—

WISHNER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh you said you read something in the magazine.

WISHNER: That the doctors today average four hundred thousand dollars a year. Tremendous. Of course they have to deal with rapid taxes and things but we didn't make anything like that. Of course everybody made a different income, not every doctor made the same amount of money, but there wasn't a big drive for money then as there is now. There was more, uh, interest in service to people. There was a more sympathetic approach to patients I would say. Today the doctors don't have a real sympathetic approach. They listen, they examine you, and they treat you but, uh, it's cold. Not every doctor, naturally.

LEVINE: Did you ever – as a physician did you ever hear anything about Ellis Island and the kind of—

WISHNER: Sure I heard about Ellis Island any time. I knew when it was done over, (?).

LEVINE: But I mean the hospitals there that were seeing the immigrants that were coming in.

WISHNER: I, I didn't have any contact or didn't know much about the hospitals at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: How about the depression? How did that affect you personally? The depression, in the thirties.

WISHNER: Well I know I lost some money. One of my friend's doctors coaxes me into buying stock and you know what happened to stocks. I lost a thousand dollars or something like that. But otherwise, I don't think we acutely felt the depression. I was able to get whiskey when I needed it because doctors had special prescriptions. So I, I, (laughs) I lived well. You gave the druggist a prescription and he'd sell you a bottle of liquor. Did you know about that?

LEVINE: No.

WISHNER: You didn't?

LEVINE: No.

WISHNER: I though everybody did. It was common practice then. Of course some people (?) we had to make our own. Gin, especially. Gin is easy to make. You get a five gallon jug and use alcohol and water and some herbs, juniper and some others, and you got gin. We had cocktails.

LEVINE: Is there any political event that you remember acutely during your years? Is there anything that stands out?

WISHNER: Well, I think the assassination of John F. Kennedy has overshadowed everything before that.

LEVINE: Why do you think that is?

WISHNER: Hmm?

LEVINE: Why do you think that that's the case?

WISHNER: Well that's more recent then some of our other – he was ah, ah, so well known and so well liked, that his death was really a shock to the country. Before that, well there was the First World War but I was an intern, and the Second World War I was a practice and I was too old for the army. So, so I had no excitement.

LEVINE: What would you say you are most proud of? What makes you feel satisfied? That you have done in your life.

WISHNER: Well I worked at a hospital for poor people without any remuneration or without any regrets or anything, but that, that was the way it was in those days. Doctors were trying to find hospital jobs where they could treat people, where there was experience for them, and sometimes they pick up patients that way. And it was exciting to be part of a hospital. There were lecturers and meetings and operations that you watched, and every year they had a dinner dance.

LEVINE: You mentioned you have a daughter.

WISHNER: Yes.

LEVINE: Did you have other children too? Or one child?

WISHNER: One child. We had – we lost a child when she was five years old. That was the days before antibiotics; I think medicine was really indifferent. WE couldn't do anything for this child. We don't know what she had (?). Pretty, beautiful child. Smart. Five years old. I sat there and watched her die. (Pauses). But then we were lucky. My friend's daughter was born in the same year, made it a little easier for my wife. Anyways, my daughter was nice. She just moved to Maine. She lived in Detroit and she did a lot of work for years at the hospital in Detroit, Wake State (ph) University.

LEVINE: What is her name?

WISHNER: Snow. June Snow.

LEVINE: Um, let's see. Is there anything else that ah – oh I wanted to go back to something. You mentioned during the flu epidemic—

WISHNER: Yep.

LEVINE: The, um, interns were taken to hospital jobs.

WISHNER: The fourth year medical students were taken out of the medical schools and put to work in hospitals.

LEVINE: So that was – what year was that, the flu epidemic?

WISHNER: 1918.

LEVINE: 1918. Now can you say anything else about that flu epidemic?

WISHNER: Well you know the flu epidemic was, ah, very bad. And there was excitement and there was people trying to get into hospitals because they think they had a better chance to survive, but still people were dying at a big rate. But I was outside of it. I was an intern; I was on the staff of the hospital; I could see patients and prescribe but I don't think I was affected psychologically.

LEVINE: Was that the biggest epidemic that you have personally, ah, been in?

WISHNER: No. There was a polio infant, ah, paralysis epidemic in 1916.

LEVINE: Oh. Could you talk about that? What, what was your experience with that?

WISHNER: Well a lot of children became paralyzed during the polio epidemic. And they came onto my attention later when I was in practice. They got older and they had deformities and needed operations. So I became aware of these paralyzed children after I started practicing and got associated with the orthopedic hospital. But, uh, during the epidemic I don't remember any details; I guess I was going to medical school. I took – In those days you could get into any medical school, there was no hassle like there is today, and I was accepted at Millview (ph) and Fordham and I went to Fordham since we lived in the Bronx somewhere near the hospital, so, so that's the way it was.

LEVINE: And It's time for us to close because you have an appointment but can you say anything about your live now? You're a hundred years old, what you attribute your longevity to and –

WISHNER: I got no secrets for longevity. I lived like everyone else. I ate everything, I drank moderately -- social drinker, cocktail before dinner – never to excess. I think that I took stress factors in a diminished manner. I think that may be one secret for long life is avoid excess stress. And some people do take their troubles very badly and some don't. I was like that not because I am cold but because I'm – I was – a doctor and I'm philosophical. Ahh, what my situation is, is, upside-down. I'm living in a beautiful apartment and when I took care of things myself I shopped and cooked and I enjoyed doing that. My wife became sick and then she passed away so I lived alone there for seven or eight years, but then I got ill to a degree that I couldn't do that without help so my family decided I had better move to a place like this. I have this room, I have three meals a day and I have doctors on duty and physical therapy. One day they have a movie and the next day they have a

concert and they have palliates and the holidays they observe here like Passover and Rosh Hashanah. So it's good in a way but of course you're tied down, you can't go and come as you please. You can go out but you got to get an escort and a pass to go out. Well it doesn't really bother me because they never refuse me. I went out shopping last week, I needed some (laughs) socks and underwear (laughs). I'm here over a year and a half.

LEVINE: So there's still room for you to make some choices as to what you want to do and –

WISHNER: Well I can't make any choices. I do what I have to do here. And I get medical attention and I get treatments if I need them and I have entertainment facilities to help me. And they honored me with a commendation for my sixty years as a – there's a plaque downstairs honoring me for my sixty years of orthopedic practice. How you get that, you pay for it. See one of my cousins paid for it. I didn't really do anything to, uh, get a Nobel prize, but, uh—

LEVINE: Sixty years of treating patients.

WISHNER: If you pay – well yeah they let them do that. I've been popular since I've been here because I don't cause any trouble and I know how to behave and uh –

LEVINE: Well I want to say it's been a pleasure talking with you.

WISHNER: Did you get what you wanted?

LEVINE: Yes this is wonderful. Thank you.

WISHNER: Okay.

LEVINE: I was speaking with Dr. Joseph Wishner who came to this country at four years of age in 1901.

WISHNER: Four years of age.

LEVINE: Right.

WISHNER: Did you say four?

LEVINE: uh huh. And at the time of this interview, September 24, 1997, Dr. Wishner is a hundred years of age and this is Janet Levine with the National Park Service and I'm signing off.