

AKRF-121

IDA SHUSTEK FELDMAN

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INTERVIEWER: JILL RICHARD

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POLAND, 1921

AGE 16

RICHARD: This is Jill Richard and I'm speaking with Ida Feldman on Wednesday, January 15, 1986. We are beginning this interview at 3:30. We are about to interview Mrs. Feldman about her immigration experience from Poland in 1921. This is side one of tape one of Interview Number 121. Mrs. Feldman, let's start with where and when you were born.

FELDMAN: I was born August the 10th, 1904.

RICHARD: And where were you born?

FELDMAN: In Poland. Siedlec.

RICHARD: Siedlec. Can you describe what Siedlec was like at the time?

FELDMAN: Can I spell that, because--

RICHARD: Sure.

FELDMAN: S-I-E-D-L-E-C.

RICHARD: Siedlec.

FELDMAN: Yeah.

RICHARD: And what was Siedlec like at that time?

FELDMAN: Siedlec was a small town with all workers and no schooling, one child from a family went to school.

RICHARD: Why was that? How was that child chosen?

FELDMAN: That's, what is chosen. One, one child from a family was chosen to go to school.

RICHARD: And was the school in Siedlec?

FELDMAN: The school was in Siedlec. And I went to school, but I didn't have shoes to wear, so I was embarrassed, so I didn't want to go to school. So the teacher put on wooden shoes and she says, "Here. You can wear wooden shoes, too." So we wore wooden shoes when we went to school. And very good education we had there.

RICHARD: So you describe this as a working class--

FELDMAN: Working class people, yes. Very poor people.

RICHARD: Very poor.

FELDMAN: And during the war they came, the Russians came in, they took everything away. Everybody was starving. They made their own money on, on, uh, on uh, motorcycles. They printed money, and they gave that money. The money was worthless. They called in the Patrolzis.

RICHARD: And how old were you at the time of the war?

FELDMAN: Uh, I was, uh, I think about, wait a minute. The war broke out in the '14. I must have been about nine years old.

RICHARD: So you remember that quite vividly?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

RICHARD: And you were, were you living with your family at this time?

FELDMAN: I was living with my grandmother, mother and four children.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. And where was your father at that time?

FELDMAN: My father was in this country making money. He had to come back.

RICHARD: How long had been in America?

FELDMAN: He was in America eight years until we came. He came

eight years later.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. And why was it that he had decided to come to the United States?

FELDMAN: Because the whole city was so poor there was no future at all and they say in America the streets are paved with gold, so he went to pick some gold. And that's what happened. And he remained, on account of the war.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. How long was he in, in the country before the war broke out? How long was your father in the United States before the war came along?

FELDMAN: Oh, about not more than a year. Because it broke out in '14. This was '13 he came.

RICHARD: Was he able to find work in the United States?

FELDMAN: You see, we have an organization here, Jewish organization that they keep you there, HIAS it's called. And they keep you there, they try to get you a job, too. And, uh, he was there a couple of months. And so he had nobody here. He left my mother pregnant, too.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. So you had, she had the child while he was--

FELDMAN: Yeah. In fact, six months later she had my brother.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. Tell us what happened when the war broke out.

FELDMAN: When the war broke out there was ration. We used to get half a pound of bread, but the bread was made with chestnuts and with straw. It was so heavy, it was a little bit of bread, and you slice it, there was nothing left. We were starving to death.

RICHARD: You were starving. And this went on for the whole duration of the war?

FELDMAN: This went on for-- During the-- And I used to go to my aunt and beg her and say, "Please lend us some money. Give us some potatoes." And, uh, I even cry today when I talk about it because when I came to this country I weighed ninety pounds. You can imagine, a girl of sixteen. And, uh, then somebody said that I could make some money during the night making cigarettes, uh, without control of the government, you see. Blackmail. So I used to work at the cigarettes. And you want to sleep,

you know, you're sleepy, you're a young child. I used to go out and take some snow and wash my face and go back to work, and that's how we made a few cents. And my mother went to, to clean the post office, and used to bring home a few dollars, otherwise we would have starved to death.

RICHARD: Did you hear anything from your father at this time?

FELDMAN: No. Not a word. Not a word. Nobody. It was closed, completely closed. No mail. Nothing. Nobody got any mail.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. And when the war finally ended, was this when you decided to come?

FELDMAN: When the war ended he wrote to us and he asked us whether we received money or packages and we said no. And we couldn't get, uh, we were supposed to come in 1920, but there was no ships at that time. You couldn't get anything. So in 1921 we left Siedlec. My grandmother, my mother, and the four children. And we went to Warsaw to buy the tickets. On the train, the train was in motion, a soldier came in back of my grandmother and he threw her down, and they had to amputate her leg. We had no home where to go to. We had to leave her in the

hospital and go to America. So we left her there and we went to Danzig, you know, the German port. And there, what they didn't do to us. They, they used iron combs to comb my hair, the nits, the lice, they fumigated us, they, it was just awful.

RICHARD: Was there a medical examination there?

FELDMAN: There was a medical examination, too. And then we boarded the ship, steerage. We were about three hundred people. After two, three days, I think it was, the ship had to go back. There's something wrong with it. Never went before, it never went again. The ship was Antigonía.

RICHARD: Antigonía.

FELDMAN: Yeah. And, uh, so we went back again, and again they did the same thing to us.

RICHARD: On a different ship?

FELDMAN: On the same ship. We had to wait for it until they fixed it. And again they, they sterilized and they combed and

they did the same thing all over again. Finally we got on the ship and we got to Ellis Island. We come to Ellis Island. Our group, the, uh, steerage, was put on the side. And we were wondering why. The second class went off, first class went off, what's the matter with us. They said somebody had died of a sickness, that we cannot get off. We have to be quarantined for ten days.

RICHARD: Someone had died on the ship?

FELDMAN: On the ship. So they put us on an island near Ellis Island. It's called Hoffman Island.

RICHARD: Was there a hospital there, or was it just--

FELDMAN: No. Just barracks. And fumigation again.

RICHARD: How long were you there?

FELDMAN: We were there ten days and they, and it was during Passover and we were religious so we wouldn't eat. So we had potatoes and herring. That's what we ate on. And HIAS heard about us so they sent us some food. And then, one girl, they found that she had too many nits in her

hair and you couldn't do anything with it, so they shaved off her head. And she was going to her boyfriend. So she committed suicide.

RICHARD: Oh, my goodness. This was while you were on Hoffman's Island?

FELDMAN: While we were there. And we used to see at night the lights from New York and we were all, "I wish we were there. I wish we were there." And finally, after ten days, they let us go off there. And while we were at Ellis Island they came, they gave us a banana. I never saw a banana in my life before. Poland had no bananas. So I ate with the skin, I tried to eat the banana with the skin, and everybody looked at me like crazy. They gave me a box of crackers. Instead of opening it right away, I opened it the-- And I struggled so, I couldn't open a box of crackers. That's how green we were. We were terrible. Nowadays it isn't that bad. Nowadays people come, they're educated, they're smart.

RICHARD: Things are more universal, I think. Can you tell me a little bit more about the ship and the voyage? Was it very long?

FELDMAN: It was just awful. We were three weeks. Instead of eight days or ten days we were three weeks because it went back and back again. And--

RICHARD: Were you seasick?

FELDMAN: Our family was the only family that wasn't seasick.

RICHARD: Well, that was lucky.

FELDMAN: Everybody was seasick, and they used to vomit from the top of us. It was, it was just unbelievable. I'm telling you. It was awful.

RICHARD: Were you able to eat anything on the ship?

FELDMAN: Well, we only ate potatoes and herring because we wanted, we were Kosher. We wouldn't eat what they gave us.

RICHARD: Were quite a few people traveling that were Kosher at that time?

FELDMAN: Most of them. Most of them, uh, wouldn't eat. Yeah, most of them wouldn't eat.

RICHARD: And were most of the people from Poland?

FELDMAN: Poland, yeah.

RICHARD: Did you have anyone from your village traveling with you,
or--

FELDMAN: No. We were the only family. Later on another family
came, but not on the same ship.

RICHARD: So after you left Hoffman's Island did you go back to
Ellis Island?

FELDMAN: After we left Hoffman Island we went through Ellis Island
and, uh, with, you know papers. Yes, so they asked my
brother, my kid brother was eight years old, so, and he
had a big belly like that. So they wanted to talk to
him, ask him what is wrong. He wouldn't answer. So they
said they're going to send him back. I just told him, I
spoke to him and I told him somebody's coming to
interview, I'm going to tell them about you. He wouldn't
talk. Then he says, "I got a big stomach." They want to
know if he knows how to talk, that's all. But the belly
came from not eating the right food, from being--

RICHARD: It was malnutrition.

FELDMAN: I have a kid sister that died of hunger while we were there.

RICHARD: So life was very miserable in Poland.

FELDMAN: Very miserable.

RICHARD: How did you feel about leaving Poland? Were you happy to be--

FELDMAN: Oh, I was glad to leave Poland. What did I have there? Absolutely nothing, nothing. Starved and, uh, we had one room, no floor. It was earth. And somebody made us a little stove from cement. It was a terrible life, terrible life.

RICHARD: Was your father living in New York at this time?

FELDMAN: He was living, yeah, on the east Side of New York, yeah.

RICHARD: And when the ship came to New York harbor, can you

remember how you felt when you saw the --

FELDMAN: I saw, but we weren't allowed. Nobody was allowed to come near us.

RICHARD: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

FELDMAN: Of course. We saw the Statue of Liberty before and we were screaming and hollering, "America! America!"

RICHARD: Was everyone on the boat out to look at it?

FELDMAN: Oh, sure. Everybody. Everybody was out, yeah. Oh, sure. Heard of America, you know. And here I didn't know what, I didn't know what was going to happen to me over here. So when I got here we were a big family so my father says, "Look, a girl of sixteen has to go to work." He took me into a second hand store and he bought me second hand outfit. I looked, I hate to tell you what I looked like with a pair of black stockings, and he sent me to work. And they paid me five dollars a week.

RICHARD: What sort of work were you doing?

FELDMAN: Hem stitching on sleeves, on handkerchiefs, on blouses.

RICHARD: Was this something that you knew how to do?

FELDMAN: I didn't. They were teaching me.

RICHARD: And what, were you working with Polish people at this time, or--

FELDMAN: A storekeeper. It was a storekeeper that I had the store.

RICHARD: Were you having trouble with the English language at all or--

FELDMAN: Of course. Of course, I was embarrassed to be. But we were lucky that we lived in the neighborhood. There were very few Jews. And the Jews that were there spoke only English, so I had, I picked it up. And then I went to night--

RICHARD: You were forced to learn it.

FELDMAN: I was forced to. And then I went to night school. And I worked for five dollars a week. And then I took the

paper and I see that I can, there's jobs for fifteen dollars, for twenty dollars. So I says to myself, "I'm going to try." I took this ad and I went down to 38th Street. I fact, the boss is still there till the every day. The sons are there. And I applied for the job. He says, "How much do you want?" I says, "Twenty dollars." From five to twenty, twenty dollars. He says, "Okay. We'll start you off." He started me off, and he saw that I know how, what to do. And every new machine that came in, he just started himself, I was the one to learn it. And I learned all the machines. Tucking, stitching, shirring, hem stitching, all the machines I knew how to work. There I met this, a fellow, and I fell in love, and we got married. We got married, we were two young snotnoses struggling, no money.

RICHARD: How old were you at that time?

FELDMAN: I was twenty-one.

RICHARD: Was he a Polish man? A Polish speaking man?

FELDMAN: He was, no, he was, uh, Roumanian. He came from

Roumania, from Lasi. So we fixed up a house, I says, "I'm going to go to work, I'm going to have a nice home, fix up a home," and a year and half later I get my little girl. He says he doesn't want me to be a worker, he wants to go into business. His brother had the linoleum store on First Avenue. And he says, "There's an empty little store opening up. See, maybe you can make a go of it." (She laughs.) So he opened up the store, and it was doing pretty well, but we lived in the Bronx and he used to come home ten, eleven o'clock. So finally I agreed, I was afraid to move to the East Side because I figured they'd kill people here, but I moved to the East Side and, and I became pregnant a second time, and my husband took sick, and I took him to the hospital and he died. I was twenty-five and he was thirty. And what shall I do? I don't know anything about the business, I don't know what to do. Here I'm with child, and here I have a little one.

RICHARD: By this time did you feel quite Americanized?

FELDMAN: I felt, yes. I knew how to speak English because I, I used to read a lot. I loved to read. I used to read, and I used to go to school at night, and I wanted to learn, because I was embarrassed.

RICHARD: Were you an American citizen at this time?

FELDMAN: I was an American citizen before I got here, on my

father's papers.

RICHARD: Because your father had been here first.

FELDMAN: Yeah. Yeah. And then, when I wanted to travel, years later, I had to take my own papers. But it was simple. So my father-in-law was very, very good to me. So he start nagging his son, his son was five years older than my husband, he should come down and help me out. He says, "Go down and she'll pay you wages like you pay--." So he came down and he stayed in the store and he tried to sell and I didn't know what to do. So what happened, uh, two years later we got married. He was never married. He was older than my husband, we got married. We got married and we struggled a little. I wanted to have a child with him, because he was very good to my children. I says, "Let him be a father, too." And I lived twenty-seven happy years and then he died. And I'm twenty-eight years a widow. I was only-- '50, '55, I don't remember when he died. So that's my life.

RICHARD: And you continued raising your children by yourself?

FELDMAN: Thank goodness, yes. I have wonderful children. My daughter, I have two daughters, school teachers, the other one's a social worker, then she took into to teaching, too. And my grand, I have two

grandsons with Ph.D's, my granddaughters all have their masters' degrees. They're all fine children. Fine children.

RICHARD: Sounds like a wonderful success story/

FELDMAN: Wonderful, yeah. Wonderful happy family.

RICHARD: So do you feel glad that you came to America?

FELDMAN: Oh, do I feel glad. They asked me if I want to go back to see it, I says, "Oh, I wouldn't go, I wouldn't even want to look what the place looks like. Never. Never."

RICHARD: If we could go back to Ellis Island a little bit, can you recall what, um, what sort of other people were at Ellis Island?

FELDMAN: They were wild. They were just wild, the people. They didn't know what's coming, what to expect. We had a woman there that her husband wrote to her that she should, shouldn't we, in Europe you wear a wig, we were religious, you wear a wig. Take off the wig and let your hair grow, because in America you don't wear wigs. Now they wear wigs, you know. So, but the woman had typhoid fever. She had no hair. Her scalp was like

this. She couldn't take off the wig. So when he saw her he didn't take her off the ship, on Ellis Island. He left her there.

RICHARD: And then what happened to her?

FELDMAN: And then the people from our town had pity on her and they went and they made a collection or whatever and they, they took her off the ship. She was with three children.

RICHARD: She went back to Poland?

FELDMAN: No, she didn't. No. Then he made up with her, but she wore a wig the rest of her life.

RICHARD: But there were many different types of people?

FELDMAN: Oh, there were tragedies. There were plenty of tragedies.

RICHARD: Do you remember seeing anyone that was sent back to their native country?

FELDMAN: Well, they, they said they were going to send, but what

happened later I don't know. They said, they threatened, that one woman had trachoma, is that what you call it?

RICHARD: Trachoma. The disease of the eyes.

FELDMAN: Yeah. They said they're going to send her back. Do, uh, I guess they did, I don't know. People like that, when they feel that they're going to go back, they commit suicide. They don't want to go back. There's nothing to go back to, absolutely nothing. Starvation, that's all it is.

RICHARD: So life was considerably better as soon as you arrived in America? Did you feel that way, or did--

FELDMAN: No I didn't, it was a struggle. I wasn't used to it. I didn't know the language and I, I had to travel to work, you know, get up six o'clock in the morning. I was only sixteen, you know. And, uh, and I gave my father all the money like a damn fool, you know. Nowadays girls are smart. Yeah. But I gave him all the money. When I got married I had nothing.

RICHARD: Was your father, did he meet you at Ellis Island and take

you to his apartment?

FELDMAN: Yes. Yes, he took us, yeah.

RICHARD: How did you get there? Did you go by subway, or train,
or--

FELDMAN: He took a taxi.

RICHARD: A taxi. Was this something new for you?

FELDMAN: I never saw a car. There by us there's no cars. And a neighbor cooked dinner for us, a chicken dinner. And that chicken dinner tasted so delicious. I'll never forget that taste. Who had chicken? We never had a chicken. We never had dinner. We never had anything like that. While we were in Europe, we had, we struggled so much, we were starving. But I wouldn't stand in line for a plate of soup. I had honor. I wouldn't. I wouldn't stand in line for a plate of soup. But we had, a distant family, she was really a distant family from us, and she, it was a holiday where you bake and you prepare and you do, and here we had nothing. So when my mother closed up, they shouldn't see us, and we all went to sleep. And about nine o'clock they knock on the door. "My aunt, what are doing here?" Roasted chicken, with a pair of shoes for my mother, with challah bread,

with other goodies. We were wild, wild. That's how we ate. We thought we'd never--. You know, coming here, too, we thought we'll never, we'll never be able to fill ourselves. I'll never forget, in Europe, I passed by a store where they're baking bread and I smelled those rolls and I smelled and I says, "Oh, if I could only buy a roll." Couldn't.

RICHARD: So you now what it's like to be really hungry.

FELDMAN: My kid, the baby, the little girl that died, a man came to see her and she gave her a few pennies, let's say, a nickel. So she used to buy herself candy. So when my mother walked over to her, she says, "Ma, here is a nickel. Buy something, some bread for the children, something. I don't want no candy." We were all starving, starving. I, I had what they called, uh, when the sun went down I was blind, my sister and I. So the doctor says I need liver, I need steak. Who saw that? I never saw them in my life. And, uh, we couldn't see at night. We went to the, to the woods one time to pick some wood for the house and we couldn't go back, we didn't see how to get back. There was no nutrition. We had no food.

RICHARD: And life was pretty primitive for you.

FELDMAN: Very primitive, very primitive. My grandmother, she didn't want to come here at all. She says America's not for her.

RICHARD: Did your grandmother recover fully from her accident?

FELDMAN: She recovered, and they made her a wooden leg, and one of the neighbors took her in, and my mother used to send her every month a few dollars that she should keep her there, and she lived to hear that I got married and I had a child. She lived about ten years more after that. She wasn't, uh, she wasn't sorry that she didn't come to America, because it isn't Kosher enough, you know. Very religious.

RICHARD: Now, you said, when you moved to the United States you lived in a, in a neighborhood that wasn't Polish. Did you carry on any Polish traditions inside of your home?

FELDMAN: No, no. We, we lived on 180th Street and Arthur Avenue in the Bronx. That's where we lived. And, uh, there were, uh, very few--. It was near the station, so there was stores, very few, uh, Jewish people there. So we spoke, you know, they spoke to us English. In fact, the one woman my mother wanted to buy something, so she brought her in the lemon and the, and, uh, the sugar. Which, which does she want, the sour or the sweet, you know? And my mother became pregnant right away when she got here. She

had two children. It was a struggle. It was a big struggle.

RICHARD: Did you and your family undergo any name changes at all in Ellis Island?

FELDMAN: No.

RICHARD: They let you keep your Polish names. We've heard that people have had, had to change their--

FELDMAN: Eh, we see, the name was short name, uh, like they have, uh, like he says in Jewish, "(Jewish Words.)" He goes and he puts his name Fitzgerald, because it sounded just like what he said. No, our name was Shustek so, uh, we remained with that name.

RICHARD: Shustek. Can you spell that?

FELDMAN: S-H-U-S-T-E-K.

RICHARD: So that was easy enough for them to--

FELDMAN: It was easy enough, yes.

RICHARD: To spell.

FELDMAN: Yeah. Then I married a Feldman. And my second husband was Feldman because it was the brother.

RICHARD: Uh-huh. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about? Anything you'd like to add that perhaps we've forgotten to ask you?

FELDMAN: What else can I tell you?

RICHARD: Anything you remember about your homeland or your voyage?

FELDMAN: My homeland I want to forget so fast. It was a bitter homeland. They used to, if you walked out in the street, they used to throw stones at you, they used to tell us, tell us, uh, "Christ killer" and, uh, "Jew hater." This, that, terrible, terrible.

RICHARD: Was this a Jewish, primarily a Jewish town?

FELDMAN: It was, where we lived it wasn't Jewish, you see. Where we lived it was a lot of Polish people, very few Jews, because it was near the station. It was, it wasn't a nice neighborhood.

RICHARD: Do you think that this is another reason that your father decided to leave the country, too, this sort of persecution?

FELDMAN: He struggled. My father left the country for another reason. My father had eight sisters and one brother. And over there the old folks used to buy what they call here a condominium, a room. and this was his. So my father wanted to go to America, but he has no money. So he went to his father, and he says, "Look, sell me this, give me this room and I'll sell it and I'll go." So he gave him the room and he sold it. But there were eight sisters. They're entitled to it, too, with a brother. So when he came home and he says he's going to America, so I ran out in the street and I told my friends, "My father's going to America. My father's-- ." So he took off the belt and he hit me so that I'll never forget it as long as I live. That's how he beat me up because I said my father-- What do I know? As a child, what do I know.

RICHARD: Why do you think he was angry?

FELDMAN: He was afraid that the sisters are going to gang up on him, they're going to kill him for it. They didn't know that he left. They didn't know he left. So that's how you have the money. He didn't have any money.

RICHARD: Did anyone else from his family eventually join him in, in America?

FELDMAN: No. They wanted to come, but the war broke out and, uh, they were all killed. There were eight sisters. One had ten children, one had eight children. They had, what a big family. He's got one sister in South Africa which, my, my kid sister lives in Philadelphia, so she, she corresponds with him, with them. And, uh, that's the only sister that was left. Of course, she's gone already, but the children were there.

RICHARD: Do you think that if you had stayed in Poland, this same situation would have existed for you?

FELDMAN: It would have been an awful struggle. There was no life whatsoever. There's no work. There's nothing, absolutely nothing.

RICHARD: And World War Two was quite a devastating thing.

FELDMAN: After the, after the Second World War they were compelled to go to school, compelled. In my time we were, we were four children. So they took one child out of four because. eh, I don't know the reason for it. Because

maybe we were Jewish. Maybe that's the reason. That's the reason, could be. Big struggle.

RICHARD: Okay, Mrs. Feldman.

FELDMAN: You know, while we're in Hoffman Island, every day we had to go to the doctor, we had to be examined. And, uh, they looked what we ate. And, uh, we were like in a prison. We couldn't go anywhere's at all.

RICHARD: Do you think they were watching for signs of disease?

FELDMAN: That disease. Yeah. They would have find a disease, yeah.

RICHARD: Were they checking your hair?

FELDMAN: Oh, and how, they were checking the hair. They used iron combs, and they used some kind of a liquid that has such an awful smell. They spilled it all over, all over your body. And the, the clothes that came out had such a terrible smell, it was so (?) you couldn't use it.

RICHARD: What sort of clothing and belongings had you brought with you?

FELDMAN: I had one dress. That's all I had. And one pair of stockings that my grandmother made me. What we had. You should know what I had.

RICHARD: Did you feel that they wouldn't fit in, in American life, or did you not have any--

FELDMAN: There was nothing to fit in. It was awful. And the rest of it was awful too, the way my father dressed me here.

RICHARD: His idea of fashion was a little different.

FELDMAN: Right. But I struggled and I says, "No, I'm not going to let go like that. I'm going to work and I'm going to make and I'm going to fix up a home and I'm going to--" I want everything, and I want my children to have what I didn't have. I tried very hard. And, thank God, I succeeded. Thank God for my good children, my grand, my son-in-laws. I have three wonderful son-in-laws. I have wonderful, my grand, my grandson in Wisconsin call me up from Wisconsin to say, "Grandma, how are you?" I think it's, I get a thrill out of it. And my other grandson from

Washington, "Grandma, how do you feel?" This and that. I feel great. It does me the world of good, because they think of me.

RICHARD: When you were on Hoffman's Island did you sleep in a dormitory?

FELDMAN: We slept on iron beds.

RICHARDS: Iron beds.

FELDMAN: No. Nothing. Nothing on it. You know, two years ago, we went to, uh, two years ago we went to Ellis Island. So they were talking. I says, "I can tell you a story." He says, "Come and tell me." So I started to tell him. He says he doesn't think they use Hoffman Island any more. He says, "I don't think anybody is there. They don't even know about it."

RICHARD: This is the end of side one of tape one of Interview Number 121.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

RICHARD: This is side two, the continuation of Interview Number 121.

FELDMAN: Oh, my grandchildren, they love to hear it. I have a granddaughter. She's a writer. So she, every time she comes, "Grandma, tell me this," and "Grandma, tell me that." Uh, one of my daughters, when my husband passed away I was seven months pregnant, and then I gave birth I didn't want to look at the child. I says, "I don't want to know her, I don't want to see her." And I got, I got a fever because I didn't nurse her, and I got very sick. And my mother took the child and she raised her. And, of course, I stayed in my mother's house, because I had to go down to the business. So my mother raised my two children for me. And, uh, thank God she's fine. She's got three wonderful sons which I'm very proud of.

RICHARD: Was there a story that you liked to tell them about Hoffman's Island, or--

FELDMAN: Oh, I keep on telling them. I keep on telling them how we starved in Europe and how, about the aunt that used to help us. One time I went to an aunt of mine and I says, she has no children, but she had so little money, "lend me five dollars. As soon as we get money from America we're going to pay you back." Well, she gave me the five dollars and I lost

it and I cried. I cried so that I thought the sky is coming down on me. And the people surrounded me and they asked me questions and I told them the whole story, how we're starving and how I went to my aunt and my aunt lent me five dollars and I lost it, I don't know how. Well, they made a collection, and they collected the five dollars, and they gave it to me. And when I came to my mother she says, "What's the matter? Pennies and nickels? What's the matter with--" I says, "Well, she didn't have any other money, so she gave me this." But I never told her the truth, never.

RICHARD: When you were leaving Poland, did you have to have a certain amount of money to leave? Do you remember any of the details about--
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FELDMAN: No. We didn't, we didn't have to because, uh, being you have a father here that, uh, and we had a, my father bought a house for five hundred dollars, and he figured, "I'll go to work and my sister will go to work and we'll pay it off." That's the way it was. Uh, I wanted to say something else. Yes. I went to an aunt and I says, "Give us some potatoes in a sack, you know, and I'll pay you." She says, in Jewish it rhymes. She says, "A sack full of holes, you can't fill it up, because it goes through." She didn't give me the potatoes. And I cried again and went home with nothing. And, oh, it was, starvation is an awful thing. We used to smuggle, uh, what do you call it, sugar, bring it in. And we had to, we

used to have, what do you call that again, tickets.

RICHARD: Vouchers?

FELDMAN: No, not vouchers. The used to give us, uh, for coffee for, uh, sugar, for this. And we used to sell that and buy something because that was too rich for us, we couldn't afford that.

RICHARD: Something like a ration?

FELDMAN: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, uh--

RICHARD: Well, it sounds like it was a good idea to come to America.

FELDMAN: Oh, yes. God bless America. Nothing like America. Give my life for America. Yes. Wonderful country. Here if you want to be something or you want to become, you have a chance, you have opportunities. But over there you just, this is the way you remain, and that's it. No, no chance of, of doing anything. The home, they live, with the water, the rain coming in, and, uh, and we had no mattresses. You sleep on straw. That's how you sleep.

And, uh, and, uh, no, no dishes. (?) Once in a while, if you had something to eat. They gave it to you in your hand like in the, the Chinese or whatever they do, in the hand. No dishes. No nothing. And we left, we had nothing to sell anyway. Nothing to give. It was an awful thing. Yes, I lived through an awful lot and these, uh, how many years? Sixty? Sixty-four, sixty-five? Sixty-five years, yeah. And when we got here, and we had, it was a nice apartment on the East Side. You had to go to the toilet in the hall, in the yard, we didn't, but we had it. We lived near, I don't know if you're familiar with the Bronx. There's a park there, Crotona Park. So my father says, "Come, let's go. We'll all go to the park." It was the Fourth of July. As we were sitting on the bench there, they start to shoot. And we got crazy. We started to run. My father says, "What's the matter with you?" "There's a war. There's a war. They're shooting already. There's a war." We were so frightened. It took a long time until the first scare, you know, left us.

RICHARD: Oh, my. Sounds frightening. Well, I think we've asked you just about everything that we'd like to, and I'd like to thank you for

this interview. It's been really interesting.

FELDMAN: I hope to live to go to see it. When do you think it will be there?

RICHARD: It should be in the museum in 1987.

FELDMAN: '87. Oh. It's too much for me to, I hope, I live in hopes.

RICHARD: So do we. Thank you very much. This is the end of Interview Number 121 with Mrs. Ida Feldman.