

NPS-15/BETTY MARKMAN

NPS-15

BETTY MARKMAN
BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 3, 1973
RUNNING TIME: 12:39
INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH
RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: UNKNOWN
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE A. KEYLOR, 1/1979
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 3/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D, 4/1995

POLAND, CIRCA 1920
AGE 14
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Markman is the wife of Irving Markman, Interview NPS-16. This interviewee speaks as though she is reading her immigrant "testimony." Janet Levine, Ph. D, Oral History Project, 4/21/1995

MARKMAN: My name is Betty Markman. I was born in a little village in Poland called Deblin. It was a very, quiet, peaceful little village. Nothing really much happened there. The only big event of the week used to be on a Wednesday when the peasants came around to sell their wares and we all came out from our little homes and bought whatever produce for the week, or fruit and vegetables. My father had a little grocery store which was located in the middle of the village, and when I stood on the steps I could see the end of the village as well as the beginning on the other side. This went on for a number of years until I grew to a certain age. Schools were not free there so my father had to hire private tutors, which was pretty expensive for people who had little money. But we did learn to read and write the several languages at that time, which was Polish, Russian and soon another language, German. Soon the war broke out which changed our lives a great deal. There was a good

deal of anti-Semitism because we were surrounded by people who were Christians, and if there was any problem everything was blamed on the Jews. (traffic noise in background) And many times we were attacked, we were attacked, and we would have to quickly lock our doors and windows and sort of hide until these people would pass and peace would be again in our little village. Soon the war broke out and they drove our Jewish people out of the village. They told us that the war would be there and that we all would be killed. So we had to walk about ten miles to another little village. We had no transportation, we were small children. My father and my oldest brother were separated from us and my mother with a little baby in her arms and myself and my little sister had to walk and we were small, and the rain was pouring down on us. There was mud all around us and we trudged along for ten miles until we came to the little village. But people at that time were very friendly towards each other. The citizens of that little village all came out and each one took a couple of people, as many as they could, into their home and shared with us food and lodgings or whatever they had. We did have to sleep on the floor, but it was nice and warm and we stayed there for a number of days and we moved on somewhere else.

NASH: (barely audible) Were these people Jewish who helped you?

MARKMAN: Yes, all Jews. We must have spent there a number of months. We did rent a little house. Sometime later my father thought he would go back and see how it was with our home, and finally my mother and ourselves went along too. When we came to our house, it was all broken up. The windows were broken, the doors were off the hinges, and it seems that the Army had used our home for a stable.

NPS-15/BETTY MARKMAN

When we arrived my poor mother had to clean up the whole house and we slept on the floor, but finally some order was made and we lived there for a number of years. And then it came, the Germans were attacking the Russians again.

NASH: What year was that?

MARKMAN: Must have been about 1918, I guess. That was the First World War. Then they drove us out again. This happened about three times and each time we were in different cities for a little while, and when we came back each time we had to start all over again. My father and my mother, who were in this little grocery store, had difficulty in obtaining all sorts of goods. They had to leave and travel distances to obtain the goods for the store, and at that time I was about twelve years old. I was left to take care of the store and take care of my two younger brothers, my younger sister and my younger brother. But I guess I was capable and I did take care of it. Now, I happen to have two brothers in America. At that time we had no communication with them during the war years. As soon as the war stopped, which must have been about late in 1919, we began receiving letters and my brothers asked me to come. I was the oldest at the time at home. At that time I was fourteen. My mother did not want me to go, but I had an idea. My education in Poland at that time was finished. There was nowhere to go. I was very, very interested in becoming more educated and I knew that if I would come to the United States I would be able to reach bigger heights than I was there. And so I kept on crying and I told my mother if she wouldn't help me I would go myself. So she took me to Warsaw which was sort of the county seat, you might say, where I

obtained my papers and I went with some older people, we were supposed to go together. But when we came to Danzig, which was the first part of our journey, from Warsaw to Danzig was a train ride, and from there we were separated and the other family with whom I was supposed to travel went their way and I remained. At that time there was quite a good deal of cleanliness and I had no one there. At that time I was a week in Danzig and every day we were supposed to go to baths and have our hair looked into and all that, and one day because I was alone, I had all my hair shaved off and there I was. And then a week later I was able to take a boat from Danzig into New York. All these war years we did not have very much sweets because our diet was mostly potatoes and bread, and just going onto the boat I saw a man selling chocolate and I bought a whole pound of Hershey bars and I couldn't wait to get on the boat to eat the Hersheys. Well as I began to eat it and eat it, and I wouldn't stop until I finished it. And as soon as the boat moved I became very ill and all the way from Danzig to New York I was sick on the boat. Seasick, terribly seasick. Well finally I arrived in New York to Ellis Island. My destination was Des Moines, Iowa where my two brothers lived. However, the money that they had sent me, which was two hundred dollars, just covered my carfare and my boat fare, I should say, and I had no money to take the train to Des Moines. So I remained in Ellis Island for a whole week. While there, it was a great big barracks. The women were separated from the men, naturally, and there were some women that must have been there for a number of, for quite a while because in the morning a bell would ring and that would be to wake us up, and I could hear the women who were waking up saying, "Ackerman," and also two or three names which they were pretty familiar with. And this is the way we were waked

up, and, of course, naturally we were given breakfast and then it was time for me to travel on. There were a few foreign people as well, but each time the train would stop a few of the foreign-born people went off, and soon I remained with another family and we had to stop in Chicago in order to change trains. Well, those people, there was a husband and a wife and I think there was a young boy, but they did not speak my languages and I did not speak their's, but because we were both foreigners, we kept close together. And we had to stay overnight and I slept on a hard bench all night long, but the day passed, the night passed and I traveled further.

(background train noise) All of a sudden a man came up to me and he told me that he was relative of mine on the train. It seems that my brothers had a relative in Newton, Iowa, and they told him to look me up on the train and come in and sort of take care of me because I was only a little girl, age fourteen. And not only was I a little girl, but I was very, very small for my age. I didn't look anymore than ten years old. And so I was so surprised that he picked me out as a foreigner, and I said to him, "How did you know I was a foreigner?" So he laughed because (she laughs) I guess I must have looked different than anybody else on the train. Finally, we arrived in the Des Moines and when the train stopped, I hadn't seen my brothers, I was six years old when they left, and, of course, I didn't recognize them, but my older brother had a sort of a family resemblance and that's how I recognized him. And I went to his home. I was terribly unhappy for the first year because I was used to a different life. I had a mother. And here I was more or less with strangers, although they were family. It took me quite awhile to get used to the country. Although one thing that I was very happy about, that was the feeling of not being afraid. In Europe we

NPS-15/BETTY MARKMAN

were continually, there was a continual fear following us. Fear in the daytime, fear in the nighttime, especially during the war years.

And here I felt the freedom. Of course, I began going to school right away because I was fourteen, but my sister-in-law with whom I stayed was embarrassed to tell the school authorities that I was fourteen because I looked so small, so she registered me as age twelve. And I very quickly learned English and I stayed with my people for a number of years until I was able to be on my own. At the age of twenty I came to New York where I finally settled. End of my story. (break in tape)

NASH: How did you meet?

MARKMAN: Some years later I came to New York because I had friends there and I soon obtained work and I lived in the YW because I had no home. There were about 172 girls and I really enjoyed those days because I had a lot of friends. One day one of my friends said, "How would you like to take a walk in the park?" Central Park was right across the street. As we were walking she met a friend of hers whom she knew. This friend had another male friend with him and we were introduced and from that time on I guess it must have been love at first sight. A year later we were married. (she laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW