

The Honorable Shelley Berkley
U.S. Representative of Nevada (1999–2013)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Second-Generation American

Representative Berkley shares her family's Jewish history.
Interview recorded July 22, 2019

I'm second-generation American. My grandparents came to this country. They couldn't speak English. They had no money. They had limited skills. The only thing they had when they came to our nation's shores was a dream, and that dream was that their children and their children's children would lead a better life here in the United States than they had where they came from. And I often refer to myself as my grandparents' American dream, although I'm quite certain neither side of my family could've imagined that two generations after coming to the United States that they'd have a granddaughter serving in the United States Congress. My mother's side of the family is from Salonika, Greece. Prior to World War II, half of the population of Salonika was Jewish. After the Nazis finished with the Jews in Salonika, out of the 80,000 Jews that were there before World War II, only a thousand survived. And I'm not presumptuous enough to think that my family would have been among the thousand to survive. My father's side of the family was from the Russia-Poland border, and an entire civilization that had existed in that part of the world for a thousand years, for a millennium, was exterminated in the Holocaust. Both sides of my family were here in the Lower East Side in New York, and that's where I was born.