EI-1047
CLAIRE GLASS (KLARA GLUZMAN) UMANSKY
BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 15, 1915
INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 15, 1999
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 83
RUNNING TIME: 1:26:22
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
INTERVIEW LOCATION: AVENTURA, FLORIDA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

RUSSIA, 1923
AGE: 8

SHIP: THE MAURETANIA
PORT: LIVERPOOL
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay. Today is March 15th, 1999. I'm here in Aventura, Florida and I'm with Claire Umansky, who came from Russia, arriving in the United States in 1923 when she was eight years old from having traveled on the Mauretania. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Umansky is 83 years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would start by giving your birth date and tell where in Russia you were born.

UMANSKY: Okay. I was born on August 15, 1915 in a little town in the pail called Koltchine.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

UMANSKY: With a K-O-L-T-C-H-I-N-E. I think on the maps you will find it now as Koltchiney [PH]. And we decided to emigrate about 1920. And in those years, as in subsequent years, Russian people were not permitted to leave. So we had to steal a—across the border.

LEVINE: Okay. Let me just ask you a few questions about life in Koltchine.

UMANSKY: Okay.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that?

UMANSKY: I remember maybe part of the—is what I heard—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: —we lived in a house. We were a family of four. I was the second oldest, my sister, Rose, my mother and my father. An aunt and uncle, Esther and Yossel [P] Gluzman, left with us. They were a childless couple. What I do remember vividly is that the Jew was always threatened and there were pogroms, regardless of whose regime was in power at the moment, whether it's Welmletsky [PH] or the Kromenski government, whatever. They always raided the towns. We had a lookout always on the outskirts of the town to alert the townspeople if there was going to be problems. And on one Friday night we were [clears throat]—we were all sitting around the Sabbath table and there was a knock on the—ah, I get choked up—[voice breaking] a knock on the window, said, "We got to get out of t"—so the women put some food into a sack. My father carried me. My uncle carried my sister and we ran along—all the other people, we ran out of town. And I remember passing a little river and [voice breaking]—and I said to Papa, "Throw me in the river. You could run faster." So little things like that. I may not remember what I ate for breakfast. [voice breaking] These things you remember. So that was Koltchine.

LEVINE: Let me just ask you your father and your mother's names.

UMANSKY: Oh, yeah. My father was Eliachim [PH] Gluzman and my mother was Yita [PH] Kaufman. My father came from a comfortable family. He was the youngest of five sons and had a sister. My father's family was in the manufacturing business of shoes and boots. They used to manufacture that for the army. And my mother's family—my grandfather on my mother's side dealt with honey. He raised bees and he would sell his honey. My grandfather never came to the States because he was beaten. And [voice breaking]—and—and he died.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

UMANSKY: Oh, wait a minute.

LEVINE: Yeah.

UMANSKY: I—I'll get Harry.

LEVINE: Do you want me to unhook you?

UMANSKY: No, no, no, no, no. I have a tissue someplace. And in any—here, I have—I have it. So Grandpa Kaufman never came to the States.

LEVINE: Were you around when he was beaten? Do you remember him?

UMANSKY: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

UMANSKY: No.

LEVINE: Let me ask you, were both sides of your family, your mother and father's side, were they from K—the Koltchine—

UMANSKY: Koltchine.

LEVINE: —area?

UMANSKY: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And that had gone back beyond your grandparents?

UMANSKY: Right. But unfortunately, we never asked the elders when we were able to. And so we can't go further back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay.

UMANSKY: Then I remember that when we decided to leave—I know Papa built in some gold into the heels of our shoes. And both my mother and my father had family here and they sent us money.

LEVINE: I see. Just the gold in the shoes is so interesting. Wh—what—w—was it, like, pieces of gold? What—do you know—

UMANSKY: Gold coins.

LEVINE: Coins, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: So they were flat.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Yeah, and because he was in the business, that's—I know a lot of people who traveled with—used to—whatever little money they had they would sew—sew it into a garment, the lining of a coat, someplace where it would be safe and hidden. But we had the gold pieces because Papa was in the shoe industry. Isn't that interesting?

LEVINE: Yes.

UMANSKY: Now, what I remember, when my father ar—hired a man, a gentleman, obviously, who had a little more freedom, with a horse and wagon to get us across the border. And it was winter. And the night—the night that they decided to—to travel there was a snowstorm. It had stopped snowing and so it was [chuckles] almost like daylight. There was a full moon and it was white snow on the ground and we were going. And sure enough, as we were moving along closer to the border, we heard horses' hoofs and we were stopped. And I was a cute little kid. Here's about what I looked [chuckles] like. See, that—that was still in Europe, that family of four. My father—my mother prodded me out of the wagon and said, "You—you go. You back the [unclear]. He'll have pity on you." And he let us go. So [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Do you remember that? Do you remember—

UMANSKY: I remember the horse seemed like an elephant. [chuckles] It was huge. I was five.

LEVINE: And—and—and you pleaded with the—

UMANSKY: Yeah, but Papa must have bribed him and we went through. We went—the next thing was we got to Lemberg. Now, today it's Lvov.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And that's where we were for three years because Uncle Sam clamped down on immigration from Eastern Europe. And there was a quota system in place so we had to wait our turn. I remember my sister always taking care of me (she was three years older), and Mama and Papa always running to the HIAS to see where we stood in—in terms of our being able to travel. When we finally got permission to travel, Papa hired a tutor for us girls. See, he—that's what I say. His family had a little bit more money than the average émigré. My mother came with a gold chain, with a diamond ring, with silver candlesticks. That was—these were treasures.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: So he hired a tutor for us and I remember knowing ceiling, floor, a couple of words here and there. And I figured [chuckles], 'Oh, I have it made.' Now, we went to Hamburg and I don't remember how we got to England, because we sailed from Liverpool.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: That's where the Mauretania—and the trip was probably a two-week trip.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: I wouldn't know precisely.

LEVINE: Let me ask you first about when you were in Lvov, was—were—do you remember those years?

UMANSKY: I remember—

LEVINE: What were they like?

UMANSKY: Well, we—we lived in a hotel in one room not too far away from a railroad station. And things you remember. I remember the antiseptics that they used in the toilets.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

UMANSKY: It was awful. I hated it. And to this day, [chuckles] I relate to—to that smell—

LEVINE: When you smell—

UMANSKY: —that, yeah. That we—we were close by to the railroad station and they had the big bathrooms and so on. I remember that one time my sister got the measles. So Mama just put me in bed with her. She figured I'll get it just the same. Let's get it over with.

LEVINE: And did you?

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: So we had the measles there. I remember my mother was a magnificent seamstress so we little girls were dressed very well. And it rubbed off on us and I m—I remember the—laying sick with my sister

in one bed. And we were trying to play and she'd say, well, in Yiddish—would you understand?

LEVINE: No, but say it. It's good on the tape. And then translate.

UMANSKY: Yeah. "[speaking in Yiddish.]" "You be the sewer and I'll be the ripper," because she knew that sometimes you had to take things apart and redo it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Ah.

UMANSKY: I mean, this is all nonsense. Then—then the next day, I know we were—we went to the east coast. We were in London. We went by train to Liverpool and that's where we got the ship to New York. Now, what I remember of the ship. We were, of course, down in third class.

LEVINE: Do you remember the accommodations on ship?

UMANSKY: No, that I don't remember. Would you believe, I don't remember that. But I do remember that when Papa, oh, gave us a treat he took—he was able to take us up to the finer decks. And he bought us an orange and that was the first time in my life that I had an orange.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: See? I have stories about what the shtetls were like and everything in my memoirs. If ever you want more information, I will get it to you. Now, when we arrived—isn't that funny—I remember the building.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

UMANSKY: I remember. That's why when—two years ago, when I corralled some grandkids when I was in New York, I says, "We're going to Ellis Island." And we had sent in money and we knew our names would be on the—

LEVINE: Wall of Honor?

UMANSKY: On the Wall of Honor. We came and we were greeted by both my mother's family, the Kaufmans, who came from New Jersey. That's where they settled. And my mother's—my father's family. His brothers settled in the Boston area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, can you remember the examina—when you arrived at Ellis Island, your impression, anything about the examinations or anything?

UMANSKY: There were lots of people, loads and loads of people. And I think our eyes had to be looked at.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: To be passed. Otherwise, you went back. And how we really were so tense because, after all this waiting and yearning, to be projected to return would have been a horrible thing. And by the way, my mother was pregnant at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: We arrived in July—July 6th and our brother was born in November. And she always used to jest that she smuggled in a passenger. [laughs]

LEVINE: How would you describe yourself as an eight-year-old, arriving in Ellis Island? What kind of a child were you? Temperament, disposition. How—how did you look? How would you—

UMANSKY: I have—I have [unclear]. Oh. [chuckles] Wait, I'm going to be in control. This is something—

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: —you've got to know.

LEVINE: Take your time.

UMANSKY: I dreaded the strange places, the strange hotels we were going to. So Mama—I—Mama made me a little pillow and she—I don't want to interrupt your tape. She made a case for that pillow with a little handle so—and I would carry it, so that wherever I went I had my little pillow. And to this day, I have it.

LEVINE: Really?

UMANSKY: I have—there were four dresses. I have two dresses that Mama made, one for me and one for my sister.

LEVINE: You have them?

UMANSKY: I have them.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

UMANSKY: I have them. And, you know, those were the years before the zipper. Millions of little buttons and hooks and hooks and buttons and buttons and hooks to close it up with a little handle so I could carry my pillow.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: But when we arrived here, my reactions to Ellis Island, I remember masses of people. I remember we had to go through an examination. But specifically—I remember the building. I was impressed. But I can't explain more than that. I know that both sides of the family came to Ellis Island to welcome us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. I'd be curious if you could describe what your mother was like, your father, your sister, Rose, and yourself as—as you were arriving.

UMANSKY: You mean [gap in tape]—thought about at that time.

LEVINE: Yeah, and how—how you approached it or—or anything about the—I mean, because everybody was an individual who arrived through Ellis Island.

UMANSKY: Right.

LEVINE: And I was just curious as to the—

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: —family members. What—what would you say about h—who they were when they arrived? What—what kinds of person—personality or—each was?

UMANSKY: [sighs] Mama—I am very much like my father. My father was very—both of them. They were outgoing, unafraid of the future, looking forward to their life in America. Bear in mind that they came to family. They did not feel alone.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: Which was a big help. And there was such enthusiasm and—and relief to get off the—the boat. I—the ship. I call it a boat. It's really not a boat. But I must say I don't remember the accommodations. Isn't that—

LEVINE: No.

UMANSKY: I just don't.

LEVINE: How about your sister, Rose. Can you remember anything about her [unclear]?

UMANSKY: My sister, Rose, was never a child. She was always given responsibility. And to the day she died—she's gone now too—she was always the caregiver. She was only a few years older. Well, she was the big sister. She took care of me. She took care of Eddie. She took—always took care of people. And—but—

LEVINE: And what were you like as an eig—as an eight-year-old? Wh—

UMANSKY: A pepper pot from the day I was born.

LEVINE: What—what do you mean by pepper pot?

UMANSKY: I was always—I had big dreams. I—I was over—of course, now, I shrunk a couple of inches. But I was never tall, as you could see. But I was always ready for the world. I—I was not afraid. I could handle anything. I was ready to tackle everything.

LEVINE: Even at that early age—

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: —you were showing signs of that.

UMANSKY: Yeah. As a matter of fact, when we came to the States and I was put into the third grade to be with my own age level, and there was, as time went on—I had a cousin one year younger. And I always did very well in school because we were always taught to accept—we had to do better than anybody else. Other, we wouldn't get ahead. So there was the joke in the family that Claire, the—be—by the way, in America I became Claire. Claire, the green [unclear], you know, the—did better in school than Sylvia, her cousin who was born here. And at one point that poor kid [chuckles] stamped her foot and said, "Well, if I were born in Europe I'd be smart too." [laughter] She was so frustrated. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have any schooling besides the tutoring in English when you [unclear] before?

UMANSKY: No, I remember nothing because, bear in mind, I left, I was a little girl of five.

LEVINE: Right.

UMANSKY: But let me tell you about Europe. My mother went to gymnas—you know, in Europe there was pay—you had to pay if you wanted to go to school. And she always sewed magnificently. So she earned some money on her own and she went to a higher level of a school. When she came here she was literate in Yiddish and in Eng—and not in English. In English, she learned here. And in Russian. I have samples of her handwriting. Oh, I have so many things that I've saved.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful.

UMANSKY: Yeah. And—and Papa. You know what Papa did that I found out in the States later on, he must have had some money. He played the Paris [unclear] while we were—in the three years, he played the stock market in Russia—in Paris.

LEVINE: Oh, so from—from [unclear]?

UMANSKY: From Po—no, from Lvov.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: From Lvov. He played the market. And to this day, I'm the kid with the stocks.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: It's funny how it drops off.

LEVINE: Yeah.

UMANSKY: And Mama, when we came to the States here, my mother wanted desperately that I go into the school of design, because she felt that I would always, if I couldn't use it as a profession, I would use it for myself, because I was always tiny. And I'd say, "No, Mama. That's not what I want to do. I'm going to study electrolysis. I'm going to study skin care. I'm going to make a lot of money and I'll give it all to the dressmaker. But"—[laughs] "but I don't want to sew." Yeah, but she—they're all—all stories in my memoirs like that. But I wish I could tell you more about Ellis Island. I remember—I don't know where my family was but we were on the lower level and I remember Mama pointing them out at a higher level. Where were they standing?

LEVINE: On the balcony, I guess. So—so—so you—you weren't detained? You walked right through?

UMANSKY: Right, we went through. We went through.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And—

LEVINE: And then where did you go from Ellis Island?

UMANSKY: Then we went to New Jersey and we were, just for a very little while—I think about six weeks—with the family, Mama's family in New Jersey. And during the course of conversations, everybody decided that—I think my father wanted to be near his family. And because he had expertise in the shoe industry—there was a big shoe industry in—around Boston.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: The decision was made that we go to Boston. So we lived in Boston for several years. But Papa was very unhappy.

LEVINE: Why was that?

UMANSKY: Well, he went to work in a shoe factory and he became the fancy stitcher. But bear in mind that in Russia he was the spoiled brat and he had no part of the factory. So he wanted to do something on his own. So we came to New York. You know, he did not have the language. He did not have the know how as to how things worked here. So he bought a little candy store, as so many others did, a grocery store, and slaved for the rest of his life.

LEVINE: Wow. Where was the candy store?

UMANSKY: In the Bronx. We had a number of them.

LEVINE: Now, so you moved from Boston to the Bronx. How—how—why the Bronx? Do you know why he chose that?

UMANSKY: I'm not going to tell you about that. Shut it a minute.

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: He wound up in the Bronx be—and we had our first candy store on Forest Avenue and 158th Street. It was even then a lower middle class area.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And if you'd like to know a little bit about that?

LEVINE: Yes.

UMANSKY: The store—there was this little candy store and it had three rooms in the back.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: So that's where we lived.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And it was very hard to make a living in good times because these were goodies that people would buy, and nobody had very much money. Then the Depression hit and things were really bad. So Mama took care of the store and Papa went to work in the fruit store to make enough money to pay the rent on the candy store. But—and Mama would spend her nights sewing. She could take a velvet sk—skirt that somebody discarded and make a pair of velvet pants for her little boy with a white satin blouse, and he was dressed like Little Lord Fauntleroy. And we girls were always dressed very well. And the girl—the women on the—on the block would say to my mom, "Oh, Mrs. Glass, you must have an electric sewing machine." And Mama would tell us girls, "Those foolish women. I cut. I sew. I baste. I fit. When it goes over to the machine, anybody can make a seam." She really—there she is there. And on that same block, there was a Yiddish, a Sholamalachem [PH] school, a Workmen Circle school. So Mama made sure that after school, after we went to public school, that we would go to the Yiddish school and get schooled in Yiddish. Now, that's not Hebrew. That is in the Talmud and that was in the Bible.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: This was Yiddish literature, Yiddish reading and writing. We learned about [unclear] and all the literary giants of Yiddish. And as I got a little older, Yiddish classes met in Harlem and I was permitted to take the subway and go on a Sunday morning for added lessons. And when the weather was nice, I remember the teacher would take us into Central Park and give us a lesson in Central Park. And these are all very delicious memories. But what I did for all the women i—in the area, they knew that I could read and write Yiddish. So they came to me so that I'd write a little letter to Europe.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember the kinds of things that were in those letters? The letters that you wrote for them?

UMANSKY: Yeah, we always—yes, how—that they were well and they were doing okay. And they prayed that they could come or—we always—for our family, we left family in Russia as well—we were always sending money to Russia, because they needed. Whatever we had, we would make do. They needed. And as time went on, Papa would sell a store, buy a store, got a little better neighborhood and a better neighborhood. And we progressed. I—this is a picture of my mother's older sister.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: Oh, this is finished. I wonder whether I could just—how do it—

LEVINE: I'm going to pause here. [tape off/on]

UMANSKY: The family here—

LEVINE: And resuming here. Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: —of six people. Now, that's my mother's oldest sister who never came to the States. And there—I don't know—what was the second name? Harry?

HARRY: Yeah.

UMANSKY: Please come here. Look how I drew a blank. Mama's older sister was named what?

HARRY: What's that?

UMANSKY: Mama's older sister. Oh, Harry!

HARRY: Not guilty. She wasn't here in the States.

UMANSKY: No.

HARRY: Well, how would I know, huh?

LEVINE: [chuckles]

HARRY: I wasn't there [unclear].

UMANSKY: Leika Beoluk [PH]. Leika. Now, of course the el—elders are all gone.

LEVINE: Huh.

UMANSKY: But I'm still dreaming that maybe one of those four children might be alive and looking for us.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: Because we lost touch with them after the war. But I remember always sending money to them. And I was already of high school age. I'd work in the summertime and Mama would sit me down. You know, you always brought the money back to Mama. You didn't spend a nickel yourself. So she would—[chuckles] one year, particularly, I remember Mama said to me, "Now, look, Claire." She says, "Rose is a big girl already." My sister, Rose. "And she's going out on dates and she needs a winter coat. And then I got a terrible letter from Europe. So we have to send them money." So that's where my [chuckles] summer earnings went. And nob—and that was the way it was. I didn't feel badly about it. That's the way it had to be.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: Yeah. But—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

UMANSKY: —go back, if I may, to 800 Forest Avenue where Mama made every effort to learn English. And she would speak to us as much as she can in English. One time, I was a young child. I was out with my roller skates. And this was Friday. She was busy baking and cooking. And I came in from the street and threw my skates down on the floor and Mama glared at me. And she said, "You just sabotaged my sponge cake." [laughs] Oh, what else can I t—I can tell you so much.

LEVINE: Well, did you remain in the Bronx as you progressed from—

UMANSKY: Right.

LEVINE: —from store to store—

UMANSKY: Store—

LEVINE: —in the Bronx?

UMANSKY: Bronx. And then we went close to the Grand Concourse, which was a much better area right near the Concourse Plaza Hotel.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: If you are acquainted in—and the—the courthouse was right across the street. And—and Mama and Papa would make their own preparations for sandwiches and judges and—and lawyers would come in and have their sandwich without a seat, just to get the sandwich that Mr. and Mrs. Glass prepared. And I, of course—I went on. In those years, you know, you could go to college for free. Hunter College. See, now it's called the University of—

LEVINE: Well, it's part of the City University system.

UMANSKY: City University.

LEVINE: But it's Hunter, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Yeah, yeah. And I always had good marks and there was no question that I could get into college and I did. But I wanted to go on with—I—and I wanted to go on with my profession that I had dreamed about. Pardon me. So I quit school. See, to—today—I mean, in those years, who would have heard of—I could go to school for free? But I decided—my uncle—one of my uncles from New Jersey got me a job in New York in an office. And I earned money. I earned $12 a week and when I got a raise I got 13. And I started to go to the Hoffman [PH] Electrolysis School, which was on 42nd Street right, not far from the library. And I worked just a few blocks away. So I worked all day and then I had a Chock Full of Nuts sandwich for a dime. And chocolate milk was a nickel. And I went on. I studied at night and then another nickel would get me home on the subway. And I did not take a bus for another nickel because I couldn't afford it. I walked through Kratona [PH] Park. And there was no fear. And the—it was safe.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And that's what I did until I got my degree.

LEVINE: Wow. Talk about the electrolysis school because that must have been early on when—

UMANSKY: Yeah—

LEVINE: —electrolysis was coming in.

UMANSKY: That is correct.

LEVINE: Tell—anything you can mention about that?

UMANSKY: Yes. I—I went to study and they taught me the technique without teaching us a great deal about the whys. There was, at that time, two schools in New York that are predominant, the Cree [PH] and the Hoffman schools. And they controlled everything. And they were both in the business of selling equipment. So they wanted to get you through as quickly as possible and sell you whatever you needed to start working. I got out and once—and I paid, by the way, $5 a week out of my salary for school. And I—and I—for the receipts I kept. I can't tell you how many years.

LEVINE: Wow.

UMANSKY: But they—I paid my $60 and then they said—they allowed me to come to practice for free if I didn't feel confident enough. I could continue going again. Now, m—my—I couldn't even go to my parents and say, "I'm unfulfilled here," because they did—they thought this was a [unclear] to begin with, that Claire was already earning some money. And she was taking that money and spending it on God knows what. Whoever heard of electrolysis? Okay. Now, we had a fam—we were living—and Papa had a store at the time on 163rd Street right off the Concourse. And we had a doctor right around the corner, Dr. Isaac Brotsky [PH], who's—today, everybody goes to specialists. Family doctors are very rarely heard of. But this was our friend, our doctor. Whatever was wrong with anybody, we went to Dr. Brotsky. So one day I walk in to Dr. Brotsky and I tell him my tale of woe. I says, "Look. This is what I studied. This is what I know. But you know, Doc, I know nothing. He didn't know what to do with me. So he says, "Tell you what, Claire. I'm going to give you some books to read. And from time to time, when I have time, I"ll quiz you." Now, what doctor would d—do that today?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: So what he did is he fed me books on the skin, on the glands, on the nervous system, anything that in any way related to the removal of hair. And this went on for two years.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: And a—this led me to go further. And then I went to study skin care. So when I retired in 1981—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: —I had a big office. I had a skin care office. I had electrolysis. I was highly respected in the field. I used to teach. And I had a mail order business because I made my own preparations.

LEVINE: Wow. Huh.

UMANSKY: I'll show you something later. Yeah, my kids wanted me to tell how it all happened. And I've got to tell you this story just to show you my personality.

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: We prepared, a chemist and I, a lotion that I named C Lotion—I took it from the word conceal—as an after treatment lotion for electrolysis treatment. That led to my—and being that I helped on the national level—I tried to get legislation and so on. They recognized me. So this C Lotion became my first mail order because everybody wanted it, so it was shipped all over the country to electrologists, not to private people. And of course, we followed all the directives of the Food and Drug. And we had to list the ingredients on the label in order of proportions.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: And—and so we did. One time, we were now out of New York. We had a beautiful big house in Yonkers and I had a wing we built for my profession. And I had a big business. One day, the doorbell rings and there is a tall man with a badge flashing it at me. And he said he's from the Food and Drug in Brooklyn. I ushered him and I asked him what the problem is. And he let me know that an ingredient—now, why don't I think of it? I'll tell it to you in a minute. It is a drug. See, and I was under the label of the cosmetics industry. He says, "That item is a drug." And I either have to be under the supervision of the pharmaceutical industry, or cease and desist. [chuckles] So at that time already I had grown children. Our oldest was an attorney. And I must find—if you want to stop the—

LEVINE: While you find the name?

UMANSKY: And we'll find the name.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to pause here. [tape off/on] Resuming here.

UMANSKY: Yeah, the Food and Drug objected to the fact that I included zinc oxide in the label. So I called my son. Bless it be. I says, "Michael." He said, "I'll go to law library and check it." Calls me back and he says, "Sure enough, Ma. Zinc oxide is considered a medicine." So I went downtown to Mr. Bernard, my chemist. This was the chemist that made my C Lotion. And I says, "This is my problem." Now, Mr. Bernard was himself—came out of the Holocaust in World War II. So he wasn't particularly afraid of the Food and Drug. He says, "Go home and make new labels and don't worry." I said to him, "Mr. Bernard, I don't want to take it out. That's the healing part of the lotion and it's so good. Everybody wants it. I don't want to remove it." So—and that's exactly what I did, which was a terrible thing to do. And I want you to know that this gentleman that you see over there, he never wanted me to work. So when he hear—[chuckles] he heard that the Food and Drug was at my doorstep, what did he need it for? Troubles he could do without. Why don't I give the whole thing up because he was doing quite well and the children—two of them were married. And I only had the young one home. So that was the story of how I got involved in my profession. And for years and years, I never belonged to an association because I felt that the association had never had anything much to offer me. Maybe I was too vain and I shouldn't have been. But ultimately, somebody came to me and asked whether I would join and maybe be helpful. So I did. I joined the New York State Electrologist Association. And the first thing that I wanted to do was to get state certification for the electrologists and thereby making the schools teach better. But the two big schools, Cree and Hoffman, had so much control up there in Albany that every time we sent up a piece of legislation they killed it. It was killed in committee. So we never had legislation. So I had suggested to the—to the association, to the membership, "Let's take out an ad in the 'New York Times.' Let's say electrolysis is terrible, that electrolysis could harm." And it's true; it could do a lot of damage. In good hands, it's wonderful. In poor hands, it isn't. They thought I was wild. They were ready to kill me, that I would do anything like that. So we never did. I—I felt if we would do that, we would have an edge up in Albany or—how could you be against it? It's like being against motherhood.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: But that never came to pass. So what I subs—subsequently did, I says, "Okay, they want to"—I says, "We could take"—we had about a hundred members. There weren't that many. I says, "We're going to rent a room in a hotel. We'll bring down machines. We'll bring down

lamps and we'll have a workshop." That started me on—I—I never taught. I w—I'm n—I'm not a teacher, officially trained as a teacher. I never got paid as—as a teacher. But this is what I did for my profession. I felt we could take these hundred pair of hands and make them better.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: So after running a very busy office, I schlepped him Saturday [chuckles] and Sunday. We—and we went and we did that. This is—and I—and you know when I got caught with this C Lotion thing in—I said to myself, "Who—this is not at item that's found on the shelf. Who would report me?" We went to St. Louis in the early '70s, I do believe, to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the doctor who perfected this treatment, to—perfected the treatment of recommending superfluous hair with the electric needle. What he was looking for was a means of removing eyelashes that were inverted that were causing infections in the eye. And they wanted to remove those eyelashes. And subsequently, it was used for cosmetic purposes.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: So you—we had our convention in St. Louis to a—and that's where I set up (I could show you pictures later) a shop with my C Lotion. And I was doing business and I lectured, and there's a picture of me speaking and indicating certain techniques.

LEVINE: And that's how [unclear].

UMANSKY: So somebody from there—because it was soon after that—probably reported me. And the Food and Drug came to my doorstep. But to this day, C Lotion is on the market. I don't have it anymore.

LEVINE: Wow.

UMANSKY: I—I sold it.

LEVINE: And it still has the zinc oxide in it?

UMANSKY: Don't tell anybody.

LEVINE: [laughs] Okay. We'll [laughter]—could you [unclear] how electrolysis was received initially by women who might—

UMANSKY: Oh—

LEVINE: —use it?

UMANSKY: I—it was welcomed. The thing is, it was not widely known as it is today. But it—those who knew realized its quality because when I first went into profession, you know, the electrolysis is actually the galvanic [PH] current, which is the positive and the negative current to remove hair. That was very slow so we had an arm doing—if you remember the old permanent wave machines, there was an arm and you—they were many, many wires coming down to clip on to the hair. This was an arm with about 10 needles. So you'd insert one needle, another needle, a third. And you had to wait until the first needle was cooked. So that was good. That was wonderful but it was slow. So those of us who were trained on the multiple needle technique were good operators. Then they came out with the high frequency current, which is the short wave. Actually, that procedure was called thermolysis. And what it was was a sharper burst of current th—and you have to do it quickly. Now, again, the schools did not train the people properly. So what did they do? They put automatic gadgets on the machine so that they would cut off so that the girls didn't do any damage. On the other hand, if they didn't make a good insertion, they didn't do any good either. So for years later, electrolysis did not, as it was known—but it was no electrolysis—had a very bad name because they'd say, "Oh, I had electrolysis. The hair come back." "Oh, I've had electrolysis. It's no good." And the answer was not in the treatment but in the person who wasn't qualified of having enough skill to perform it accurately. That's when I came in to teach.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And I showed 'em what to do. They'd cut off that automatic pedal. You have to use a slower current. You have to use more time. You have to make an accurate insertion and then you'll get it done.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: And then we had the blend of both currents, which was wonderful. So today it's much, much better. But you probably heard a lot of sad tales about electrolysis.

LEVINE: Well, is it—is it supposed to be a permanent effect?

UMANSKY: Absolutely. And if you want somebody in New York, I'll tell you who to go to.

LEVINE: [laughs] Okay. Okay. Let's see. [sighs] So when did you meet your husband?

UMANSKY: Uh—hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm. I knew him for about three years before I met—before I met—I—before we were married. And he was—we're related but I never knew him as—as a member of the family. Now, I want to show you something. Do you see these two older people?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: They're not husband and wife. They're sister and brother. The lady is my grandmother and the gentleman is my husband's grandfather. We were—we were cousin's children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Now, they used to live in the Lower East Side. He was born there. And when they moved to the Bronx, my mother used to say, "Cousin Sarah, you ought to go over to my sister," because he had an older brother. "You know Cousin Sarah lives in the Bronx now and she's got boys." So—and my husband's sister, older sister, became friendly with my sister. So through this relationship, I met him. And I was not one bit impressed. He was wearing knickers. That was the style of the day. His front tooth was missing because [unclear] came in contact with a flashlight and knocked his tooth out. And—but we dated a little bit but he didn't mean anything to me. And he started dating a young woman downtown called Dorothy, because he asked me to become serious and I wasn't ready. I thought to myself, 'If he could go from me to Dorothy, goodbye, darling. That's it.' I accepted it. Then I was working in 1350 Broadway where I—where I earned my 12, $13 and then—then went to study. And he was working for Joseph Kerson [PH], a few blocks down the road. And you'll get a bit of history there. One day, as I'm leaving the office building, I see him coming up with Dorothy and another friend and his date. And they were going to the NRA parade. It was after the Depr—oh, way after. Harry. Oh, God. What did NRA stand for? After the Depression, there was a National something. NRA meant—means what, Harry?

HARRY: National Recovery [unclear]—

UMANSKY: Nat—and that was—and that went on for how many years after the Depression? Franklin Roosevelt instituted it.

HARRY: That's correct.

UMANSKY: You know what that was?

LEVINE: No.

UMANSKY: Never heard of it?

LEVINE: No.

HARRY: National Recovery Association.

UMANSKY: Okay.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Okay. There was a parade there. So we'll get back to my dating him. The National Recovery Act was instituted by President Roosevelt—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: —to help us out of the Depression. They put artists even to work.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: That's when they had the big highway programs to—to get—

LEVINE: The WPA and—uh-huh.

UMANSKY: The WPA and so on.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: That was part of it. So as I was going out that day from—and there was already in the—the—we got married in '38, so it was in the middle '30s. And I saw Harry going over with his [chuckles] date to the NRA parade. And I went on to the subway and I—I wasn't happy. I didn't like it. [chuckles] It bothered me seeing him with Dorothy. But I was very proud so that was it. But what did the trick is that summer he went off to Florida with Dorothy's brother. They went on a car trip. And my birthday is in August. [chuckles] And I got a simple birthday card that I still have that says it simply, "I will always remember your birthday."

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: So that did it. So we saved and planned. And what do you suppose—and he was making $35 a week.

LEVINE: During the Depression?

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: During the ‘30s?

UMANSKY: Y—yeah. And he was very proud of that. But he had zilch and I had zilch. This is how we got married. I had saved up the tremendous amount of $400. And Mama and Papa were just between stores and they always were short. So I gave them the money when they opened up the last store near the Concourse. He, on the other hand, had a little policy with Metropolitan Life and took out a loan to dress up his parents’ living room. So I had nothing. He had a loan. And that’s how we got married.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: But we were right.

LEVINE: [chuckles] So—so you continued your career and then y—you had—oh, why don’t you mention your husband’s name?

UMANSKY: Harry.

LEVINE: Harry. And your children? Their names?

UMANSKY: Yes, Michael was our firstborn. Three years later was Sandy. And we—those two children were born in the Bronx. And then we were able to buy our spacious home in Yonkers, with a lot of space. And that’s when we decided to have another child so it was a big difference in years. Then Jay was born. Unfortunately, we lost Sandy.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: She was 44. She married a religious boy and she left me six children.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: So—and we’re very close. And those three children that are married, of the six, I have 10 great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wow! Oh, that’s wonderful. Let me ask you about coming here as—as an immigrant at an early age. Do you think that experience made a difference in the kind of person you became?

UMANSKY: It did. It did.

LEVINE: And how—in what way?

UMANSKY: In what way? The American child, who—the average American child, even then, had much more than we immigrants had. And the drive to excel, the drive to succeed, and I must say it was our parents, but all the parents—so many of the parents that came from Europe. They knew that they'll see their fulfillment in their children, that their children had to go to school, that the children had to become doctors and lawyers and what—a—and to—to really—so we were driven in—in a sense. The psychology was different too i—in that, today, if the child comes home, the mother encourages him. "You're doing good, dear. Do better." Do you know, when I was taking sewing lessons, when I was in junior high school, I was in the rapid advancement classes? So the first year, we had to make our skirt, a pleated skirt. And the second year we had to make the midi blouse. And that's what we used for graduation. In those days, we had sewing classes. So I brought [chuckles] home a 95 in sewing. And what do you suppose my mother said? She said, "Where's the other 5?" Now, the—today's parents wouldn't react that way.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: She wanted perfection and that did not—maybe today a parent would say, "You are clobbering this kid. You're not allowing this child to develop." But with us Europeans, that wasn't the case.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: The reaction was not the same.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Did you keep into a community that was a lot of immigrants or Eastern European origin when you were growing—

UMANSKY: In the beginning. In the beginning, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what kinds of social functions or were there groups involved, social organizations or—

UMANSKY: You know what the organizations was? Burial societies.

LEVINE: Oh, would you talk about what they—what did they do? What was their—

UMANSKY: Well, the first thing, what they did, the people who came from the same town, they called landsleit.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And they would gather, when they established themselves and made a salary and, you know, and knew how to deal in a dollar and so on, they knew the first thing they h—they needed to do was buy a plot, buy a bur—burial plot. And—and usually, the name of the association was the El Shanar [PH] or the Koltchine [PH], the town from which they came from. They gathered. And the big activity was the association. Once a year, they had a ball and meetings and—and so on. Those—then there were some Europeans who—everybody that came from Europe were, in a sense, religious. So there were those that came and the intelligencia [PH], who threw off the yoke of—not Judaism. They were very much Jewish. But they threw off the orthodoxy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: You—you blend in to the American way of life. You have to work on Shabbos; you work on Shabbos. But they were very much Jewish.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And you didn't hear of intermarriage. That was a shanda [PH]. That was terrible. And then there were those, like Harry's parents, who became active in the shul. And everything was close by. I have beautiful notes from him from the Lower East Side.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: So what would you say—oh, maybe you can mention how the name got changed to Glass.

UMANSKY: How was that changed? We don't know. We know that the—the two brothers, my father's two brothers, called themselves Glass.

LEVINE: I see.

UMANSKY: So they were the ones that changed their name and we followed.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about heroes or heroines? Did you have anybody that you looked up to, either somebody you knew or knew of that you would liked to have been like when you were forming your [unclear]?

UMANSKY: Well, you know who my hero was?

LEVINE: Who?

UMANSKY: And I speak about him in my memoirs. Jack Bernstein. Jack and Minnie were also related. They were related from the—from the Bernstein end. And they were a childless couple. And they were of the intellect. They were the ones who fought for a cause. And—and they knew all about Yiddish theater and Yiddish—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: You know, everything. And when he'd go to a soccer game he would take me, schlepped me along, Jack. And when I had a question about homework I'd go to him, not to my father. Papa—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

UMANSKY: —have Papa take me [unclear].

LEVINE: He was your uncle?

UMANSKY: No, he was actually a cousin to my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. I see.

UMANSKY: See? And as we got older, they kind of—I used to boast I had two mothers. I had Minnie and I had my own mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Because she smothered me with love.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: As I mentioned to you, my grandkids were always enamored with their grandma that came from Russia. And so when they had to write a composition or anything where they had freedom of the subject matter,

I was always interviewed on the telephone and they would write stories.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: So that's what prompted me to feel that I have to record everything—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: —for them.

LEVINE: And apparently, you've saved so many things, so many artifacts or whatever—

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that you have. Th—that's just wonderful. So you have like a—

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: —little mini-museum.

UMANSKY: Yeah, right. And here, if you like, dear, I'm going to give you these pages.

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: Do you want me to clip them together?

LEVINE: Well, yeah. We can do that. Why don't I ask you a little—

UMANSKY: Okay.

LEVINE: —a few things that are related to things you've already said. The HIAS. You mentioned that they were active in—

UMANSKY: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: —in Russia—

UMANSKY: In Russia.

LEVINE: —before you left.

UMANSKY: In Russia, and, well, I don't remember Russia. But I do remember—

LEVINE: Lvov.

UMANSKY: —Lvov.

LEVINE: Right. And do you re—what else is—is there anything else you remember about the HIAS and the role they played in—in the case of your particular family?

UMANSKY: No, I do not. I just remember how often my mother and father went there. And I was—and my sister, Rose, taking care of me while they went—

LEVINE: I see.

UMANSKY: —to inquire.

LEVINE: But in this country, did you have any contact with them afterwards?

UMANSKY: You know what I did? Pretty recently, while I retired, as I was getting busier and busier, I called up the HIAS and I—through them, I got an electrologist, an émigré from Russia. And I gave her a job.

LEVINE: Oh. And how did that work? What did they do? They found someone?

UMANSKY: Well, then they—they had people there trying to—to pl—to place. And that family lived in Brooklyn. And of course, I had the big house and my children were already married. And the father and mother, when I came with this young girl to—for her interview, and I suggested that she stay from Monday to Thursday with me, then go home, because the trip was just too much. And she did, because I wanted to relate to somebody from the Old Country. I wanted to do something for her. And to this day, we're very—we're in touch with each other.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: She's very successful here in New York. And—but when she was with me, it was interesting. I tried to tea—she did not have a light touch. Her name was Tatiana [PH]. And I would try to show her a little different way and she would say to me, "In Russia, we do it such way. In Russia, we do it such way." You know, even though they ran away from this terrible Russia, there was a certain amount of pride in the homeland.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: But she's very well situated now and I'm very happy for her.

LEVINE: Was she doing that kind of work in Russia already?

UMANSKY: Ah, yeah. Very little.

LEVINE: [unclear]

UMANSKY: She was a young girl.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: And the mother was a dermatologist.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

UMANSKY: You know, what they teach in Russia, they do not r—[clears throat] they don't teach the doctors [clears throat] in a complete way. They channel them immediately to their specialty. So they—when they come here they're not qualified—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: —to practice here.

LEVINE: Wow, interesting. Now, how—if you could talk a little bit more about the two—the—the Russian side and the—and the American side and how you think about them in your own mind.

UMANSKY: You mean the people or—

LEVINE: No, your—yourself. That—

UMANSKY: [clears throat]

LEVINE: That you have the Russian roots or the farmland.

UMANSKY: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And you have now America, which has been—

UMANSKY: Is my country.

LEVINE: How do you think about those two, in relation?

UMANSKY: I am very much American. This has been my life. This is where I grew up. Sometimes, you know, you visit Israel and people want to know, "Why don't you emigrate?" Because it's one place that will not have anti-Semitism. And it—it's not from me. I just cannot pick up roots. This—this is my home.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: But I want to tell you something else about Russia. [clears throat] You know, every man had to go into the army and everyone dreaded going into that army. And my father made himself deaf on one ear, punctured an eardrum. Also, I remember—the things that you remember are not the everyday things. We had in the main room a chiffaro [PH]. And when they pushed away the chiffaro, Papa dug a big hole underneath on the earthen floor, and there on blankets or something he lay hidden. And they put the chiffaro back on so that he could not be found when they went looking for him. That's why you've heard so many youngsters came with nothing, a boy, 14, 15, 16. They just—people sent them out of the country so they would not have to be conscripted in that terrible army.

LEVINE: Was it worse for Jewish boys than it was for the—uh-huh.

UMANSKY: Always. The Jew was always the butt. To this day, it is not much different. Maybe there's a certain amount of freedom. But anything that happens here in the States, if anything goes wrong it's the Jew's fault. Are you aware of that?

LEVINE: To some extent, I guess, yeah.

UMANSKY: I'll tell you about my personal run-in with anti-Semitism.

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: I was already in Yonkers and I had this successful office. And I used to wear white uniforms and I had a little Italian woman, Rosemarie, who had a uniform store on McClann [PH] Avenue that I would visit two, three times a year.

LEVINE: [unclear].

UMANSKY: Yeah. And—and the reason that I went to Rosemarie and nobody else for years and years is because Rosemarie altered for me. And I

always needed alteration. So Rosemarie would shorten, whatever had to be done. And I'd buy two, three uniforms at a time and I'd be fine. One day—and we had a wonderful relationship as a customer. One day, it was wintertime and it was snowing. So I had a lot of cancellations in the office. So I decided this is the day I'm going to go over to Rosemarie and get a few uniforms and I did. And the—her shop was quiet. She gave me a few things to try on. And I went into the little room to change and from the other side of the curtain I heard this, "What do you people want? We need oil." Now, there was no more conversation between the two of us. I usually am not short of words but I was so taken aback that Rosemarie would talk to me that way that I took off the uniforms. I went out and I said, "I really don't like anything today. I'll be back." I walked out and never came back. So when the chips are down it comes to the foreground. The "New York Times" i—is very, very neutral as far as the Jews are concerned. But you hear it over and over again, "This is the Jewish establishment. This is the Jewish estab"—of course, those of us who come from big cities, like L.A., New York, Florida, here, you don't have it that much because we're visible. And—but you go to the Midwest, you go to the heart of the country, it's there. There's no question that it's there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: I can tell you too when I was just a child, when we lived in Chelsea in Boston I was just a little girl. And we had a cousin, Elliot, who was blond and handsome and who taught. So he got a job on the cape because he neither looked Jewish, nor was his name Jewish. And—but in those days a Jew couldn't get a meal on the cape.

LEVINE: Oh.

UMANSKY: If we wanted to go down to the cape, Elliot knew just where to take us. Other th—it was off limits.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: See, and that's not so far—so long ago.

LEVINE: Right. Tell me about the high points and the low points. What would you consider the high points of your life or things that gave you a lot of satisfaction in your life?

UMANSKY: I married a wonderful man. I thought—I want to touch this.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And this is from my heart. You know, I'm the aggressive one. He is fine as silk, never, never say anything harmful to anybody. And I thought to myself, 'What a team. I could lick the world!' But in truth, and I'm not complaining about anything, but he very often held me back because I knew what his wishes were.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: You see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: But that's all right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: I was fulfilled by three wonderful children. And now, even at my age, and I often say that to women, I says, "I'm not a, 'Hello, how are you?' grandma. I'm involved with every grandchild and every great-grandchild. And if I have to scold, I scold. If I have to guide, I guide and let the chips fall where they may." And I must say, they love me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: So what else can I ask?

LEVINE: Right, yeah.

UMANSKY: As a matter of fact, my—I—my oldest granddaughter, who is in New York—she's a writer, and she's dating now a psychiatrist. And, you know, in our day she'd be an old maid. Ellen is going to be 30 and her young man that's she dating is going to be 30. They knew each other from college and what they're waiting for, I can't tell you. Well, they—I—I never met him. S—and they're planning to come, just so Grandma should see him.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Very sweet. Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: So high points. Those were high points. When I—when I talk, when I lecture, if I know my material, I don't get nervous. I could just go on and on and on and on, as I'm doing to you.

LEVINE: Wonderful. [laughter] Well, how is this time in your life, now that you're retired from your business and h—how is this period?

UMANSKY: How is this period?

LEVINE: Yeah.

UMANSKY: First, when I came down here—I want you to know, for a while, my husband, who is not as well as I am, we had a condo (not this one) where we would come and go. He would come down for the winter and I shuttled back and forth to Yonkers. And my assistant would be there and sometimes I'd spend a week. But otherwise, I would work for four days. And Friday, I didn't work. And when the taxi came to get me I was exhausted. I'd sleep on—I'd stretch out on the back seat. It was big enough for me—till he brought me to LaGuardia. I'd come down for a weekend and Sunday night I'd go back.

LEVINE: Hmm.

UMANSKY: And we—to—to work again. And I worked all my life and I did not feel deprived. I'm not a luncheon girl. I'm not a card-playing girl. I still work a little bit. And I'm busy with the family. I'm busy with the computer. I'm busy with the stock market. I'm busy with my memoirs. But in the beginning (I was beginning to tell you) when we closed the office and sold the house in Yonkers, and I had a place to go to because we had that other condo, it was awful. I says, "The place is dead. The phone doesn't ring." I—it was rough. We went to the university, whatever, adult education courses, that kind of stuff. And little by little, I adjusted. And I'd say th—that we're lucky to have both of us reach this age and we're comparatively well. Of course, the grandchildren thing—think that Grandma will go on forever because she doesn't get old. And I'm trying to hang around a little longer. [laughs]

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh. Very good. Okay. Is there anything else? Any causes that you've ever taken up or any events of, I don't know, political or—

UMANSKY: Yes.

LEVINE: —nature that you—

UMANSKY: Yeah. When I w—when I was a teenager, give me a cause and a soapbox, I'll fight for it. Those were the days of socialism.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: To help the—lift up the workingman.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: Jack Bernstein was my hero because he was—he worked in the Furrier's Union but he had far more intellect th—than that. But he was the representative and he's fighting for the people for a better life. And tho—those were the things we did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: We did. And then when I got involved in electrolysis, so that was my—my thrust, and I worked to elevate them. And it was good.

LEVINE: How did you get—how did you know so early that you wanted to do something with—

UMANSKY: I was [unclear]—

LEVINE: —skin and—

UMANSKY: I'll tell you what. It really wasn't that at all. Those were the years when being a nurse was a—a respected profession.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

UMANSKY: And I was devastated when I applied for nursing school in Mount Sinai and I was turned down. And do you know why I was turned down? Because I always had good marks. My height. There was a height requirement. I had to be a little—at least five feet tall and I wasn't. And the nurses there—at the time, the nurse did everything for the patient. And I remember the head nurse saying to me, "What are you going to do with a—with a six-footer in bed?" You know, you have to turn him over. And she told me then that I could go to Flower [PH] Fifth Avenue Hospital, that maybe their rules weren't as strict and I could get in there. But I couldn't be a nurse if I couldn't go to Mount Sinai. And I turned to that because I, myself, had hair on my lip. And I had, at the time, been going to an electrologist in my neighborhood. So I got a glimpse of what it was. And then I could still wear the nurse's uniform. So I turned to it as second best. Of course, after a while, I wouldn't give it up for all the tea in China. But that's how it evolved. And I remember Mama calling everybody in New Jersey, all the family, that Claire had some crazy notions in her mind. She was giving up school and she's going to a paid school. Whoever heard of it? And so on. But I was determined.

LEVINE: Did your mother ever change her mind?

UMANSKY: Oh—

LEVINE: Was she still alive after you got into it and—

UMANSKY: Oh, sure. Sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

UMANSKY: I have a big guilt complex with Mama because I was always too busy in the office. Too busy. And the last time she came to me, I'll never forget it. She lived already in New Jersey. They were retired so they moved back to Jersey to be near that family. And she was coming to me so she had to take the buses into 42nd Street. Then she took the subway to the Bronx and then she stopped on the concourse and bought herself a pair of little red shoes. Then she first had to take a bus to come to me. Then she had to walk up two big blocks on a hill. And—and I didn't—sure, I was with her but I wasn't with her as much as I should have. Hmm, hmm. So—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything—you mentioned you would like to find people who maybe knew—

UMANSKY: Knew [unclear]—

LEVINE: [unclear] say what you would like in case someone should hear this tape.

UMANSKY: Yeah. If anybody from [clears throat]—from Russia, anybody who knew the Gluzman family, anybody who know the Kupnecht [PH] family—the Kaufmans were renamed Kaufman here—please contact me. Please contact me, anybody who in any way, from Koltchine, from—what was—Proskorov [PH], from—we'd love to hear from you. Maybe we're related. Okay?

LEVINE: Okay.

UMANSKY: I don't know what else to say.

LEVINE: Yeah.

UMANSKY: I'd love to find people.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add to what we've talked about? I know you mention a lot more in your memoirs than we've had time for here.

UMANSKY: Had time for here.

LEVINE: But anything [unclear]—

UMANSKY: Did I tell you about the Statue of Liberty and what [unclear]?

LEVINE: Oh. No, tell about that.

UMANSKY: When—when they refurbished the Statue of Liberty, it was 1994, 1996—not so long ago.

LEVINE: Earlier than that.

UMANSKY: A—and they sold [unclear]—that was—it was about that time that they instituted the Wall of Honor and so on. We became members. And I bought—there was coins to be bought, silver coins commemorating that event, sets of coins. I bought 12 sets for my 12 grandchildren. And along with our—I wonder whether I have it here—and along with the coins, I sent each grandchild a letter as to what the lady in the harbor means to me. Shall I read it?

LEVINE: Yes.

UMANSKY: I said, "Each of you" [clears throat]—"will receive shortly a silver dollar commemorating the hundredth birthday of the Statue of Liberty. This beautiful lady standing so" [clears throat]—"so majestically in the harbor of New York welcomed me to these United States. She has been to me, as to your grandfather, who is the son of immigrant parents, a symbol of hope, of freedom, and boundless opportunity. We hold a special affection for this lady. Although cast in stone, she symbolizes the living essence of this wonderful country." [voice breaking] "We know, as you must know, that our country, albeit it less than perfect, is still the best country in the whole world. And your grandfather and I consider ourselves privileged to live here and raise a wonderful family. The future is yours. The opportunities are vast. And each of you can be the very best you want to be. Let this silver dollar shine as a beacon to lead you—you on your way" [voice breaking]—"to success and happiness. Love, Grandma and Grandpa." I'm sorry.

LEVINE: [chuckles] I think—

UMANSKY: [crying] There. It's yours.

LEVINE: Okay. Thank you. I want to thank you so much.

UMANSKY: I want to thank you.

LEVINE: Beautiful interview.

UMANSKY: If I've taken so much of your time—

LEVINE: No, I—I think this has been a beautiful interview. I've been speaking Claire—

UMANSKY: Claire—

LEVINE: —Umansky, who came in 1923 at the age of eight from Russia.

UMANSKY: Right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine signing off for National Park Service.

[END OF INTERVIEW]