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HENRY EDWARD HAMAN
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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ROMANIA VIA ARGENTINA, 1922
AGE: 1

SHIP: TUTONIA [PH]
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is June 29th, the year 2000. I'm here in Roselle, New Jersey with Mr. Henry Edward Haman, who came through Ellis Island when he was less than a year.

HAMAN: No, a year and a half old.

LEVINE: A year—one year and a half old.

HAMAN: Right.

LEVINE: And that was in 1922.

HAMAN: Right.

LEVINE: And Mr. Haman came with his parents from Romania originally via Argentina and then through Ellis Island.

HAMAN: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Mr. Haman is 78 at the time of this interview and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

HAMAN: Beautiful. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay. If you'd say for the tape, your birth date and where you were born, and the name you were born with.

HAMAN: All right. I'm Henry Haman. I was born July 24, 1921 in Csatad, Romania. And I was born as Heinrich Haman.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, what—would—could you spell and say again the name of the place—

HAMAN: Oh.

LEVINE: —in Romania where you born?

HAMAN: The name of the place was Csatad—C-S-A-T-A-D, formerly known as Lenauheim—L-E-N-A-U-H-E-I-M. It's one word. The difference being two different countries. World War I, it was lost to Hungary until the peace treaty was signed. Then that land was given to Romania. So we have two different countries, two different nationalities, two different names of the same town. My mother and I were born in the same house in two different countries. She was born in Hungary. I was born in Romania. So—

LEVINE: Now, was your mother's family from that area?

HAMAN: No, both my mother and my father were the results of Bismarck's—[chuckles] the chancellor of Germany's push to get Germans to go to the east. In other words, he wanted Germans to go to the wheat-growing countries of Eastern Europe and settle there. And they settled in different parts of Europe. My parents settled in Austro Hungary. And their parents actually settled, and then did so. It's about a hundred-year history of two German families living in Austria-Hungary. World War I came. My father was conscripted and spent the three years in the Austria-Hungarian Army. When the war ended, he said, "I've had enough of this. Let's go to America." Within one year, I was born. The family packed their goods up. We headed for Hamburg, Germany for a ship, hopefully, to America. It turned out we had to go to Argentina because of visa difficulties. They were not taking that many people from Romania in those days. So we had to take the ship, the U.S.S. Tutonia from Hamburg to Buenos Aires, Argentina where we lived for a year and a half, waiting a proper visa for my father and mother. It finally came in 1922, at which time we boarded a

ship, the Pan America, for New York City and passed through Ellis Island, November, 1922. I was then a year and a half old.

LEVINE: Okay, let's—let's just take that segment first and I'll—I'll question. Then you—

HAMAN: Great.

LEVINE: You can continue the next part. Y—so wh—why don't you say your mother's name and her maiden name?

HAMAN: All right. My mother's name was Margaret Bucher—B-U-C-H-E-R.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

HAMAN: And my father's name was Frank Haman. H-A-M-A-N. In those days, he was known as Franz—F-R-A-N-Z. German.

LEVINE: Now, did you have grandparents living in Romania before you left there?

HAMAN: My father's mother lived in Romania with us. What I didn't know, and I only found out in the last few years, was that she also came from Romania with us to South America. And the only reason I knew that was I saw it on the passenger last of the S.S. Tutonia. They had a fourth Haman there and I didn't know who it was until I saw the age, 68. And I realized it's my father's mother. But she was not on the passenger list coming to the U.S. She apparently died in South America in that year and a half that we were there. So that was an interesting part of my past that I wasn't aware of, and I only found out through the passenger list of the two ships.

LEVINE: Wow. Let me pause her just for—[tape off/on] we're resuming here. So we were talking about your grandmother, that she apparently came along with the family.

HAMAN: Right.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about your father? After World War I, do you know why—I mean, the war was over—he didn't have to serve in the army anymore—why he decided this is enough. Do you know?

HAMAN: Sure. He was 29 years old. He, remember, had fought in the Austro-Hungarian Army. We are now living in enemy country, Romania. And he was actually a foreign soldier. And we don't know whether the times would have been rougher on him or not. But they would have been different, that's for sure.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And he decided the best thing to do—not only that but the re—other reason was he had three sisters who lived in New York City. And they kept egging him to come to this country. And that was the other thing that pushed him. As I said, the reason we didn't get here right away was visa problems. He required enough—they required enough time for the—be put on that list to get here. So we went to South America. His three sisters lived in New York City and when we [clears throat] got off the—the boat in Hoboken, I guess we stayed with one of the three sisters until we found a home ourselves. My father was a—a bricklayer.

LEVINE: A bricklayer in Romania?

HAMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Before the army?

HAMAN: Well, yes, he was just started then because, remember that he had been in the service there. But he had—he was a bricklayer.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And when he got to New York, there was plenty of jobs in the area here, New York and New Jersey, for us to at least establish ourselves. We lived in a tenement building in Yorkville in New York. And my earliest recollections were, and from what my mother was telling me, they were superintendents in a tenement building, which made it easier on them, because it kept the cost of living there down. The only interesting thing I remember, or don't remember—I remember my mother telling me about this—in the first year or two that we were there in the early 20s, she was a victim of one of the con jobs that you see so much of today. A so-called electrician came to the apartment to check the wiring and stole everything, what little they had, in the apartment and left. That's when she had her first taste of how to prepare [chuckles] as a immigrant. But she always told that story and we remembered it.

LEVINE: So, when do your memories start? Do you—do you have memories of Yorkville?

HAMAN: Yes. I remember Yorkville. I was there until—let's see, from '22 to '26. That would have been four years. That would have meant I was there till I was five years old when—yes. I remember living in Yorkville [clears throat] in the tenements and watching the streets—I mean, streets in parentheses, the young kids, the teenagers, every—running. And I

always remember the fact that we had gangs and wild life in those days too. It wasn't as bad as it is today because it was more innocent. It was not a question of guns and knives and things as today, but this running around in groups was pretty constant there. But I was too young to be part of it. I just saw it.

LEVINE: Were there, like, fights? Is that what [unclear]?

HAMAN: Yes, teen fights.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: That kind of thing. It's—it's Yorkville, East Side, New York. But I was too young to be part of any of that stuff, except to observe.

LEVINE: Do you remember the address you lived at in York—Yorkville?

HAMAN: I lived on 88th Street.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: And that's the best I can—

LEVINE: Okay, uh-huh.

HAMAN: On the East Side between First and York Avenue, just about near where the mayor is now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: And I remember my—not my parents so much, but my three aunts taking me to Central Park. That was the big highlight of New York City was Central Park, the Goldman band concerts. Not at that time so much as probably three years later, when my parents—my mother got pretty desperately ill. And I was forced to move back to New York with one of the aunts and live there for over a year. At that period of time—that was in the fourth grade. That would have made me about nine years old. I spent a lot of my free time with my aunt going to Central Park. The Goldman band concerts, the Museum of Natural History and I guess there were a few other, would have been free things, that we saw in those days that I remember to this day. In fact, I have done very little of going back to New York to see any of that since then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: But—

LEVINE: As a little boy, can you remember some of the things that struck you about, you know, maybe the Museum of Natural History and—

HAMAN: Yes, I always remember the planetarium. That's in the back of my mind. That was impressive. I remember the immensity of the museum. As a four year old and five year old, everything looked a lot bigger in those days. So [unclear] New York City, the—streets, how big it was, how dirty the streets were. And when we went back for that year in—in 1925 when my mother got so sick, and I stayed with my par—my aunts for one year, I remember in that year the—I went to a Catholic school. That was a big thing there. I had come out of three years of public school here in New Jersey, had to go to New York, went to a Catholic school in that year. And it wasn't quite the same thing. But fortunately, my father got himself a good job in New Jersey. My mother got better. We moved to New Jersey from New York and I spent the rest of my teenage years going to Linden schools, Linden, New Jersey, from that fourth grade on right through 12th grade through high school. I had spent those next 12 years in Linden going to school here. And I guess there wasn't much of a highlight in the 12 years that I was going to school there. I did pretty well in school. M—my father lost his job in the great big Depression of '30, '31. There was no more building, no more anything. And he got sick as a result of his job as a bricklayer, lung problems. So he was out of work for years. My mother was forced to go out to work and I was going up, going through high school. I worked as a pin boy in a bowling alley in those days through four years of high school. It was touch and go but we made it through. And World War II came along. I enlisted the year that it started. I enlisted in the Marines, spent the next three and a half years in the service, came back to Linden and spent the next couple years back—going back to my job, which I had just started before I got into the service in General Anilene Incorporation in Linden. And it was a—a lifesaver in that it now helped support the family. I was now working for a living.

LEVINE: You were the only child?

HAMAN: No, I forgot all about that, of course. In New York, the only thing that was a highlight, other than [chuckles] my observances of what was happening there was I had a sister, who was born two years after me, and a brother that was born two years later than that. So that would make my sister 76 now and my brother 74. And both are still around.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And they were both born in New York City. But after they were born, then we came to New Jersey. My father had bought a house, built a house and we bought it. And we lived there from 1925 till 1931 when the

Depression really hit, when he got deathly sick. He lost his job. We lost the house.

LEVINE: Wow.

HAMAN: We were part of that group that just couldn't make it anymore. So all these, my junior high school and high school years, we were just hanging in there and did the little odd jobs that I could after school and, as I said, the bowling alley as a pin boy for four years in high school. My mother worked a little. And we visited my father in the—in those days, they had a tuberculosis sanitarium and visited him weekends.

LEVINE: Where was that sanitarium? Do you know?

HAMAN: In Scotch Plains here.

LEVINE: And what—do you remember anything about his treatment or anything about that whole experience?

HAMAN: Only one thing about his treatment is he—he was telling us that he was one of the patients that was undergoing a new treatment they called pneumothorax [PH]. It was a—I remember being impressed at the expression because, what it boiled down to was it was injecting antibiotic into the lungs in order—in other words, it was an actual needle injection to the lungs.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And filled it up with the antibiotic. And it was an ongoing treatment that had just started a little before then. He was one of the orig—first—first patients. It apparently worked because, within two years, he was out of there. He was feeling a lot better. And—

LEVINE: Did you visit him?

HAMAN: We visited him every weekend. We used to either have friends drive us, because I couldn't—I didn't drive. My mother didn't drive. We had friends that volunteered to take us up every weekend, Saturday or Sunday. And life was like that in between schooldays.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything else about the sanitarium?

HAMAN: It was a beautiful location, looked like the [unclear] grounds up in the hills [unclear] Mountains here, and was an ideal spot for that kind of thing, tuberculosis treatment. As I said, the treatment was successful enough that he got out. That was probably in 1939 when I was graduating from

high school. And he got a job then with the city of Linden, worked for them for a number of years. It was in 1949 that he died, three weeks after my son was born. I got married to my wife in 1948. In 1949, my son was born and three weeks later my father died. We were still all living in Linden. Now, when I said my son is born, I did not mention our marriage or leading up to it and my wife. Okay. Meeting my wife, she was a Navy veteran, World War II, stationed on the East Coast and mostly in Portland, Maine and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I had been in the Marines for three and a half years in the South Pacific and had just returned, spent a year in Linden, dating in general, just making up for lost ground. My wife had a very good friend who was in the Navy with her, who worked with me in General Aniline. My good friend invited her down for one Christmas vacation and asked me, since I was in between dates and that, whether I'd be good enough to blind date her good friend from the Navy who was down from Maine. I did that, November of 1947. We hit it off well enough. She came back for New Year's, which would have been the next year's vacation, to spend another week down here. And the two of us hit it off real well. She lived in Bangor. I lived here in Linden. And it was difficult to make dates on that 500-mile trip. So what we did was we would do a 250-mile trip each up to Boston. And we did that on the three-day holidays. We went there for Washington's Birthday. We were there for Memorial Day. We were there for the Fourth of July. On Labor Day weekend, I gave her an engagement ring. In November, we got married. Now, this is five dates [chuckles] and a ma—and a wedding ring. That was 51 years ago.

LEVINE: Wow, that's—

HAMAN: So it lasted.

LEVINE: What's your—what—what was your wife's maiden name?

HAMAN: Her name was Margaret Elizabeth Connelly [PH]—Connelly. And—good old Irish family, daughter of an Irish cop who had to put up with the fact that her daughter was going 250 miles on a three-day date with a stranger from New Jersey. But we all survived that. And as I said, that was 51 years ago. I had worked for General Aniline from 19—

LEVINE: Say—could you spell the name of that company so I have it right?

HAMAN: General—

LEVINE: General.

HAMAN: Aniline—A-N-I-L-I-N-E. It's a name of a dyestuff. But that's what we were, a dyestuff manufacturer in Linden. It's now known as the GAF

Corporation. I started when I was elig—eligible to start at age 18, which was 1939, and I worked with them also for 51 years.

LEVINE: Wow. Can—

HAMAN: I was 69 when they let me retire. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow. [chuckles] Can you say something about the company, what it was like when you first started [unclear]?

HAMAN: Oh, God, yes. I was hired the day the Germans invaded Poland, August 31st, 1939. [chuckles] I always remember that because of the headlines and that. And General Aniline Corporation was a German-owned company at the time.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAMAN: Which made conditions a little up in the air. The company was—I don't say taken over, but was supervised by the Treasury Department in—in 1940, '41. This was the time when England got into the war, France got into the war with Germany. And we were sitting on the sidelines worrying. And since we were a dyestuff corporation, a lot of our manufacturing material was important to both sides, for uniform dyes and stuff like that. So we were a critical company, both to us and to the German side. So I guess in the early—1940, 1941, the U.S. decided it was time to take the company over to avoid any further risks of alien problems. I was only 19, 20 at that time but still afraid of my job, because we didn't know what would happen to the company. But it all worked out smoothly. The U.S. Attorney General's Office ran the corporation for a number of years under their—what—what did they call it when they take them over during wartime, like the ships and the rest of it? Not contraband but it—well, it was—

LEVINE: Yeah, I know what—

HAMAN: —taken over by the—by the country in those early years there. It was pins and needles as to what was going to happen to us. But it all worked out well. The company made out well. The war ended and we were still under the U.S. control until litigation settled the issue. The Germans said it really should go back to them. The Swiss said they were a neutral country, who should have owned the—General Aniline. And the U.S. said, "It's really our country as part of"—[clears throat] spoils of victory." The court settled the issue, I think in 1956, '57, and we finally privatized and became a corporation on our own and we still—we still are. But as I said, I worked with them until 1990. And 51 years with them, and I've

been retired for 10 years now. But I had many good years while I was working with them, believe me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, can you say anything about how the—the company and the work that was done in the company changed over the time?

HAMAN: Well, yes. [clears throat] Originally, it was a—an adjunct of a German dye company. We were just the American division of a big, major dyestuff company in Germany. And they had them throughout the world. And we were basically dyestuffs and chemicals related to them after the war.

LEVINE: Was it like a factory, would you say?

HAMAN: Yes, it was a big factory.

LEVINE: So—

HAMAN: Like Dupont.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: And somewhere—

LEVINE: What were conditions like? Like in the factory, were there—were there any union issues or—

HAMAN: Like in—in all industries, there are—always have been union issues. I was a lab technician. Therefore, I was part of the union when the union finally came in. And we had our problems and a couple of major strikes. But it always resolved itself. As I said, whenever there's a problem of conditions in the country being bad enough that industry laid off its people, I was always there just a little longer than the rest, and I made it. Where a lot of my friends over the years lost their jobs in the company, I managed to make them all, as I said, for 51 years. But as far as the product in General Aniline, there had to be a shift. The war was over. There was very little demand for dyestuff, for uniforms or anything else. And we got into what they call the special chem—chemicals area. We had to make raw materials and products for hair products, skin products, soaps. About that time is when they started the great transition. Instead of a soap bar being a soap bar, they made it out of the new chemicals. Can you remember Dove soap?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: Dove soap was the first—one of the first soaps made that wasn't made like soap. It was made—it was one of the new surfactant chemicals. And

we were the originals—originators of that product, sold it to somebody, Palmolive or somebody, and known for a number of products that were manufactured in our plants that became major products. We did most of the raw material and byproducts into—when you bought a tube of toothpaste, there was a General Aniline product in there. When you bought a hairspray product, there was a General Aniline product in there. Whether it was a soap, soap powder—no matter what it was, there was—one of our products was in there. And I worked in a laboratory over the years along with this. And that went on and it is on to doing the same thing through today. The company got big enough to expand to a number of different divisions. We bought up different areas that are all part of the General Aniline and Film Corporation today. We bought up an industry called Ruberoid [PH] that makes roofing shingles, one of the big producers of roofing shingles today. We still do that. We were the American division of Ansco films. All Ansco was made by us in this country. And we had that division for the longest time until we sold that off. We—

LEVINE: Hmm. How do you think being in that company for so long and through such changes—how—do you—how do you think the company affected you personally, being sort of a part of it and—

HAMAN: Ah—

LEVINE: —your allegiance to it, I guess you would say.

HAMAN: Please—

LEVINE: Wait. Be careful of your—

HAMAN: Oh, I can't—

LEVINE: You want—

HAMAN: I want to go get something.

LEVINE: You want to pause?

HAMAN: Please, can I go upstairs to get something?

LEVINE: Okay. Sure. Okay, we're going to pause here. [tape off/on] Okay, we resuming here.

HAMAN: Okay. I had said that I worked at GAF for 51 years. On my 50th anniversary, the company submitted this to our local newspaper.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAMAN: That was another of my good friends, who's also [chuckles] worked in GAF with me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: And we both [chuckles]—we lived in the same area of Linden when we were kids.

LEVINE: Right.

HAMAN: Kindergarten up through 12th grade. After 12th grade, I went to work in GAF. Fred got interviewed to work in GAF and we worked in different parts of the same factory in Linden for 30-some years. When our division got shipped up to Wayne, New Jersey, I moved up there. Fred moved up there. And then we wor—worked about 20 feet apart for the next 15.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAMAN: On our 50th anniversaries, which were submitted the same time, we were still working 20 feet apart, where 65 years earlier we had lived a couple hundred feet apart in Linden. Fred lives in Clark, which is just a little ways down here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: And we had that one thing in common. As I said, the company really honored us. This is our company newspaper.

LEVINE: I see.

HAMAN: And—

LEVINE: Oh, very nice. He didn't come through Ellis Island, did he?

HAMAN: To where?

LEVINE: To—did—did your friend, Fred, come—

HAMAN: No, he was—

LEVINE: —to this country? Or he was born here?

HAMAN: No, I think Fred was born here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: But he was of German extraction too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: In the ‘20s and ‘30s, everybody who lived in the Linden area there worked in American [unclear], General Aniline, Dupont, Esso, which is Exxon today—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: —and General Motors and were all blue c—blue collar people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: But in General Aniline, since its home establishment was Germany, a lot of our fellow employees were German.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

HAMAN: Those people that I got to—knew well—I knew through the company were—were German as a result. Fred’s family worked in General Aniline. He got a job there as a result. Ernie’s brother, older brother, worked in General Aniline. He got a job there as a result. So this German hand me downs was quite common in those days, which also—

LEVINE: Let me ask you, do—were there any people who were taken as enemy aliens, Germans that you know of from either Linden or the company and sent to Ellis Island as in—and interned there during World War II?

HAMAN: I never saw this in the paper. But my understanding was that one employee was taken in Nevada as an enemy alien, or, I say, enemy alien, I’m not sure is—alien. It was just a suspected enemy.

LEVINE: Right, right.

HAMAN: German extraction, like they did with the Japanese on the West Coast, you know. If there was any fear of any problems, you interned them. To my knowledge, there was only one man that was interned in that sense. And I’m not even sure that it’s just—it was by word of mouth. I never saw this in the paper or anything.

LEVINE: Did you ever see people—because there were so many German—people of German extraction employed there, did you—was there—were—were there investigations of the people that you knew about at all?

HAMAN: Yes, including me. When the Treasury Department took over in 19—late '40 or early '41, most of us were interviewed to some extent. But remember, I was just a 19 year old or so. So there wasn't that much concern about somebody like me. But I was asked questions, how did I get a job there and so on, and where did I live. But basically, there was—there was nothing much. I imagine those employees, the machinists, basically, who—a lot of them came from Germany—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: —and to work in the American company here, were interviewed in much greater detail. But as I said, other than the fact that they now had a—T—Treasury Department had an office there and was in charge of the company, there was nothing really different as far as the work's concerned. Everything went on like normal. I'm sure [chuckles] though, whatever products might have gone down to South America to be transshipped to Germany or so, that stopped. I'm s—you know, after all, we were international company and they were sending all over, and we were not at war. But there was that gray area. We didn't want to risk anything. France and England had just gotten in war with Germany. And politically—

LEVINE: And you were gone, actually. The time—the time that we were in war—at war, you were in the Marines. Right? I mean, you weren't really there when—when people were being taken to be interned.

HAMAN: That was '40, '41. I enlisted in '42.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

HAMAN: Yeah, it was that two-year period that I was really concerned about. But then I enlisted in the Marines and, for four years, I didn't know anything about it. I went back to General Aniline from there. My service record was part of my total record. I mean, nothing was taken away from me at all. But the initial stuff was all done in that year or two before I went in the service.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: So by the time I went in in September, '42, everything had quieted down and we were just peacefully running an op—our operations. But as I said,

in those days everything was basically dyestuffs. We had almost nothing else that we were doing.

LEVINE: I see.

HAMAN: And what the war ended, that ceased. No more demand. We had to diversify and they did. And as I—they're doing well today. Now, they're known as ISP Corporation.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAMAN: GAF Corporation still exists but that's the name they—they left with our roofing department, the ones that make the ceiling—the roofing tiles and that. But the chemical specialties are now known as ISP, International Specialty Products.

LEVINE: Okay. Could we go back to the Ellis Island, arriving at Ellis Island? Is there anything that your mother or father told you about the Ellis Island experience for them?

HAMAN: My father said very little about anything per—pertaining to those days. My mother gave us—the problem with that is it was done all while I was a teenager. After the teenage thing, I went in the Marines for four years. After I got married, we lost m—m—all personal contact, in that sense. But what I—I do remember was that it was a big, big, immense place. And what I recall, or what I think I recall, but maybe get from the Ellis Island book here that I've read and everything—

LEVINE: Yeah, sure.

HAMAN: The pictures and stuff like that. I remember being impressed about the size of it. The only thing that I can remember in those days that's really factual is going from New York to New Jersey here by way of the ferry, and then the train to Linden. But that ferry ride, that tremendous elevator that took you from the ferry to the path lines and to the railroad, I guess that was built for immigrants, really. It was like—an elevator was about twice the size of this room. It was that kind of a thing. And it was a—an experience you did every time. You got on the ferry, went across the Hudson River and looked at the great, giant Colgate clock in Jersey City. And you got off at Hoboken and down this monster ele—elevator. And then on the other side, the tr—train tracks were there. And we came to Linden. I looked forward to that every trip we ever made.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: That, to me, was one of the highlights of—

LEVINE: Right.

HAMAN: —traveling from New York to New Jersey. But as far as Ellis Island itself is concerned—

LEVINE: Nothing in particular happened—

HAMAN: Nothing in particular, no. Nothing in particular happened there that Mom ever thought worth talking about.

LEVINE: How about—you—you couldn't get the visa when your mother and father and you were in Romania. You couldn't get the visa to the United States so you got it to—

HAMAN: Right.

LEVINE: —to Argentina. Then when you did leave Argentina to come here, did you have a vi—you had a visa—a—a Romanian or an Argentinean—

HAMAN: I think Argentina gave it to us because we couldn't make any contacts s Romania. Don't know how to put it. But there was one thing that I had written here.

LEVINE: "I, Fran"—

HAMAN: Francisca [PH], my father.

LEVINE: —"Francisca Haman, a subject of Romania, hereby swear that I am unable to obtain a new passport, because there are no Romanian diplomatic or counselor representative in Argentina. I present, in proof of my identity and nationality, my old passport issued by the prefecture of police at Bucharest, Romania." Dated August 6th, 1921.

HAMAN: And that was the one that I had.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HAMAN: Here.

LEVINE: I see.

HAMAN: I had the original passport upstairs—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: —of both my mother and my father. But here's this copy that I made. But—

LEVINE: So how about your three aunts that were in Yorkville?

HAMAN: Uh-hmm. Yeah, my father.

LEVINE: What—you spent the whole year with them. First of all, they had come earlier from Romania?

HAMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you know why they came when they did?

HAMAN: They—well, I don't know when they came but logic says, since there was a war going on, they couldn't have come here before 1918. Armistice was signed in November, 1918. They had to have come in 1918 or 1920.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And 1921. We left there in 1921 to go to Argentina. So it's very likely they were here for a year or two. My one aunt—my br—my father's one sister lived in Nor—Long Island. One sister lived in the Bronx and the other sister lived in New York, East Side where we moved. That's where we moved to be near her.

LEVINE: Now, did she work?

HAMAN: They all worked.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAMAN: They all had housekeeping jobs, that kind of thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: In other words, immigrants looking for work—

LEVINE: Right.

HAMAN: —anywhere. And you had two things you could do. You went out looking for housekeeping jobs or you tried to get tenements where you were a superintendent and you had rent free while you worked there. I think those were the two most popular areas of work in those days.

LEVINE: So were they speaking English by the time you came? How—what do they speak at home?

HAMAN: Always spoke German. Oh, they spoke—they spoke Hungarian amongst themselves. When there were group gatherings at one of my aunts [unclear], most of the time, the language was Hungarian. There was some German, no—no Romanian at all. And of course, they all could speak some English. Now, I can't say how well any of them spoke. Just knowing my mother and my father, they both spoke English well enough to get along in this country and that I—the last—as far back as I can remember. And Mom, herself, had jobs in New Jersey as housekeeper to different families. So in effect, they got [unclear] their contacts with people they worked with and got to know the language. Neither one of them, other than having an accent, had any problems as far as speaking English.

LEVINE: How about you learning English? Was it just second nature because you were so young?

HAMAN: Oh, n—no, was no problem at all. The schools did that. I went to all the—

LEVINE: When you went to school, were you speaking English when you started?

HAMAN: I must have. I was in kindergarten, first, second, third grades here in Linden. I have no indication of not speaking English.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: I—I'm sure that there was no problem speaking English at all. And in fourth grade, it was back in New York for Catholic school for one year, and then back to Linden for the rest of the eight years.

LEVINE: Was your family Catholic? Were you—

HAMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Were—was your family religious?

HAMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: They were Roman Catholic, both of them, and I was baptized in Romania. I have my mother's birth certificate, my father's. And I think I have my

grandmother's birth certificate in here too, 1857. They—Mom saved a lot of papers. I must say that.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

HAMAN: And through the years, between my sister and myself, we managed to hang on to 'em until today.

LEVINE: How about a commun—community of European—in other words—

HAMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: —an ethnic culture that your family kept—kept in contact with? Are you going—are you going to go away—

HAMAN: Oh, forget it again. Now, this—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

HAMAN: I just had a few pictures. Forget it.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

HAMAN: In the 1920s, as I said, I was there from—even when we lived in New Jersey, in the 1920s we used to go to New York for group gatherings and that—by that, I mean people that came from Romania, who settled New York and met as a club. Remember, in those days, there were a lot of singing societies. Whether it was German, whether it was Hungarian, whether it was Russian, this was one means of community contact with the old home. And in Yorkville, which was a German section of New York, there was an awful lot of Germanic groups. My father and mother belonged to a group of German Hungarians. Remember, we were different from Germans. We were German Hungarians. And I can remember there were a lot of good Saturday night dances. And of course, there were the seasonal things, the big October fest, the Spring Fest, this kind of thing, which [unclear], every nationality had their own version of the same thing. Festivals, harvest festivals, spring festivals and stuff like that. And they were good times and they kept together and they had a lot of friends. When we moved to New Jersey, as the years went by, there were less and less of them. But they always kept in contact with some. And with the three sisters involved, we had a lot of contact with each other over the years. And I think every one of them lived through the end of their 60s or so. In other words, there were a lot of years of communicating with each other.

LEVINE: Could you say any more about the singing societies? Anything about them that you remember?

HAMAN: I know very little about the ones that my father belonged to, except that they were all dressed in their costumes. They were really weird and in New York City, Yorkville and—

LEVINE: Their costumes, did you—

HAMAN: Oh, yeah. That's [unclear] one picture of them costumed. I don't know if the kind of thing that Ellis Island would have liked to have had in that. I would have given it to you if you thought so. Right after this, I'll go up and get it.

LEVINE: Okay.

HAMAN: But when I [clears throat] came back—I mean, when I was working in General Aniline, as I said, a good many of my friends were German. And the gentleman that got me my job in General Aniline was the head of a singing society itself in Linden. And he got me to join it. So in Linden itself, I joined the Singe Freund [PH] from Linden when I was a teenager. And I guess I must have belonged to it for about—well—well, let's face it. I probably belonged to it for five years until the T men came in. And I think that's one of the things that—that was disbanded, or fizzled out, the German Singing Society, because of World War II. I mean, I think it fizzled out then. I mean, I can't recall it, except I had gone to the service.

LEVINE: Right.

HAMAN: And I never came back to a singing society. So I assumed that it had fizzled out then. There are still a few of them around in real German-held areas. Union in Hudson County, there's another one—big ones, yet. But—

LEVINE: Would you travel or wh—who would be your audience? Or did you ha—did you sing to audiences? Or you got [unclear]?

HAMAN: We sang for the fun of it, basically.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: Like these barbershop qu—quartets, except we would have highlights, either our spring, Oct—or October festivals. We would have always big singing affairs. And then there were the singing contests with each other. Union against Linden, against Elizabeth, against Hudson County.

Different singing societies competing against each other, basically still just for the fun of it.

LEVINE: And who would judge such a thing as far as the competition of the societies for singing?

HAMAN: Who would what?

LEVINE: Judge it, as to who—

HAMAN: Oh. [laughs]

LEVINE: —who won. [chuckles]

HAMAN: I—I—I don't know. I assume it was one of the neutral singing societies at the time would do it, because it was merely for fun. There was no real big anything to it. And—

LEVINE: Was it men and women?

HAMAN: No, those were men.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: Ah.

LEVINE: Large number in a—in a typical group?

HAMAN: The one that we had in Linden, I think, was as high as 30 or 40 men.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so would you practice or you just—

HAMAN: You practiced every Tu—Tuesday in the Polish National Hall. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: It was all for a good time. You practiced. You sang for two hours. Then you had the beer and salami sandwich—liverwurst sandwiches after that. Always remember that, liverwurst and onions on rye bread and beer. Oh!

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAMAN: That was heaven.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: But that lasted for a few years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Let me just—let me just think about asking you—do you think—do you think—when you think of your family—your mother, father, your aunt—do you think that they—the immigration experience made a difference, affected them as far as who they were or what their personalities were like? Their character? Because you were—you were really a baby or very, very young. But—

HAMAN: I just know what my mother—

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAMAN: —told me, basically. And I'll just say this. [clears throat] Mom was 25. Pop was 29 when we came here. Mom told us, since they both were farmers—lived on farms—Mom was—hired herself out from a 14-year-old. Because they didn't go to high school. My father might have gone a few years of it. High school was not an option for a woman in those days. Mom used to work as a plow hand behind a horse and a plow—now, this was probably through the war years until she met my father. Then they got married, which was only a year or so. And then, of course, the baby and then going away. So there weren't that many years that I know of. But since she was 25 at that time, I would say that for that 10-year period before that—in that, from when she was 15 on, that's what she did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: She worked as a plow hand in that sense. She knew life in its roughest and she was tough. In fact, Mom was the tough one of the family. And these decisions were made. Mom made them and she was firm, real good, strong-hearted woman and strong willed. Pop—before the war, I know the one thing that they talked about a lot, he was a clarinet player with the Hagenbeck [PH] Circus, which was one of Europe's big circuses at that time, traveling around the capitols of Europe. And this as a late teenager, early 20s. And he did that for a number of years. Now, whether this will also along with his being a bricklayer or learning it then—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: —I don't know. Because when the war came, he then was—1914 to 1918, a four-year period in his life—went down the drain. That shook him up to where, as I said, losing your identity personally, your country, from

Hungary to—to Romania—not only losing your country, but losing it from a friend to an enemy, this all changed his mind as to where we're going to go and what we're going to do. So when the option came from his three sisters, "Come here. This is a better place for you." And we made that decision.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: Well, that was it. And everything looked rosy. And for those initial years that we were here, Pop was working good as a bricklayer and so, well enough that, in building five houses here in Linden, he made enough to want to buy the middle one, which we moved into and lived in for seven years.

LEVINE: Now, in other words, when had you say "made five houses," was he working for a company as a bricklayer who [unclear]?

HAMAN: He was working for the Bricklayer's Union—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: —who then hired you out to different areas to work. And in those years, in the late '20s, everything was being built. Schools were being built, post offices, city halls, apartments. So there was never any end of work to be allotted. And Pop was constantly busy. Even when Mom was sick and we had to move to New York, he still worked here in Jersey, in Linden, mostly. A lot of the big public buildings in Linden, he had a hand in to some extent. And as I said, the five buildings that—two-family apartments that were being built in '20—1926 and '27, Pop made enough to put a down payment on a middle house. The five of them are still standing there. All my friends live in them now, so I'm down in that area quite a bit. And—

LEVINE: So do you think your mother and father were—were happy that they had made the decision to come?

HAMAN: Yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAMAN: Yes. Pop may have, in his last couple years, had his regrets that illness brings on you. When you're down, you're in the dumps and you've got to blame somebody or something. Remember, he died of an illness that—he didn't die of the illness. He got the illness—resulted from his working with concrete—

LEVINE: Cement, uh-huh.

HAMAN: —and plaster and cement and stuff. But nothing he could do about it. He was a—healthy. You know, he died. He was 57. [clears throat] So [clears throat] it was the kind of thing that would bring him down when he—and his last few years [clears throat] after he had the illness and before he died that he worked for the city in Linden [clears throat], the Road Department, to him, life had gone downhill all around.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: He wasn't able to really support his family much anymore. Mom had to work those years. I was working as peanuts as I could while I was going to school. We had a brother and sister that were in school, and so things were not looking that bright.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: But as I said, we got through it. And after Pop died, let's see. Mom died in '74. So she died 30 years later.

LEVINE: Oh, so what—did your mother work after your father died?

HAMAN: Yes, she worked, still doing the housework, stuff like that.

LEVINE: How did she feel? Coming from the hard farm work—

HAMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that she did, was—was doing domestic work something that she thought was a—was a plus? Or did—how did she feel about that?

HAMAN: Mom—Mom never looked down on it. She—she was a good house—good at housework.

LEVINE: Housekeeper.

HAMAN: Housekeeper. And having been used to hard work, this was not what you'd call any big deal, and it brought food on the table.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: We ate very sparsely and everything. I mean, we ate real European style, minimum, basic meat and potatoes. And we all went to the school and we stayed healthy. And other than having to move around a little bit here to there in that world, it was all local and we stayed ahead of [chuckles]—

the—the real hard times. And when I got out of high school, I immediately got the job in GAF, which made all the difference in the world then as far as food on the table, more than ever.

LEVINE: So in other words, you, as the—as the oldest son—

HAMAN: Right.

LEVINE: —really had a certain responsibility—

HAMAN: I did. Those—

LEVINE: —on your shoulders.

HAMAN: Those four years I was in high school were the critical ones because that's when my father was in the hospital. Mom was working as she could and trying to raise the three kids, and we were all in school.

LEVINE: Was there a—was there a decision point about you dropping out of high school to work in order to help—

HAMAN: No.

LEVINE: —financially?

HAMAN: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Or that wasn't really—

HAMAN: No.

LEVINE: —a major concern?

HAMAN: But there was a decision. When I was a junior in high school, I took an aptitude test, recommendations of my congressman, for West Point. And [clears throat] in the middle of my junior year, I went to New York for a physical, [clears throat] was going in for the tests in general. And I was turned down because [sniffs] I had a slight hearing problem and a nose problem. [sniffs] I had sinus problems. So they said, "Go back and straighten it out and come back for the tests and everything. It'll work out." That was, like, in the spring of my junior year. Over that summer, we gave a lot of thought as to what I should come back to do that. It would have meant stopping what work I was doing in there. Well, that was—I did—[unclear] years ago. But, projection ahead, it would have meant I wouldn't have been able to work. My parents would have to afford whatever it would take for me to be at West Point, if I had made it.

[clears throat] That would have put a whole new lifestyle on everybody. And we were not in that financial condition to make that decision. So along with that came the offer from my friend, “As soon as you graduate, do you want to work in General Aniline?” And that was the deciding factor then. I didn’t follow through on West Point. And I went to GAF.

LEVINE: Did you re—did you regret it or did you—

HAMAN: Not then. When I got out of the service [clears throat] and began—it came to me that if I had gotten in West Point then—that would have been 1939—and come out in 1943 as second lieutenant, that was the year that all the 90-days wonders, is what they called—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: —people like us that were in for three months and then went in for Officer’s Candidate School, were being drafted to go to Europe. And that was the highest casualty list in the country. And that was young officers in Europe fighting at that time. And that would have been the class of ’43, ’44. And when I got back out of the war safely and I got to thinking about having—“Should I have gone to West Point?” or did and everything, it dawned on me. I would have probably been in that group to have gone to West Point instead of spending three and a half years in the South Pacific and coming home safely. That was just in retrospect. But it was a—a—it was really something I—I would have had to face. And I’m glad I did make the decision, as it is now.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: Everything that happened since—I went in the Marine Corps so it turned out positive in that sense. Even when the war ended, I was supposed to come home. I was in Guam when Truman had dropped the atomic bomb. I was all set, suitcase packed, ready to come home. I’d been in the service for three and a half years, had no—never had a day off, really. In other words, the South Pacific, I’d never been anywheres where I had a three-day pass or anything like that for three and a half years. It never happened. We’re ready to come home. We could—looked forward to it. They dropped the bomb. The decision was made in Washington that people that are coming back first would have to be servicemen with years of service, servicemen with years of marriage, servicemen with kids. Twenty-year-olds like me had to stay. So they unpacked all my stuff. I was put on a ship with other youngsters to China to do occupation duty. The war was over now. But instead of me coming home, as I was looking forward to, I had to go to China, which I’m glad I did now, because I had spent 45 days there, something I never would have done. It was

peacetime now and it was an experience that was different that I never will repeat. So in that sense, that was a good decision too. But—

LEVINE: Did your mother and father become citizens at any time?

HAMAN: Part of the papers I had here, his citizenship papers and the rest of them, were in 1934 when he became a citizen. And my mother did too. I automatically became one because I was under two years old when I came into the country.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: The law said, if you were under two, you became a citizen on your father's papers. And that was that. But he needed papers to get all this done, and so we had to send to Romania for whatever papers they could send him for whatever verification they needed for him to become a U.S. citizen. But that was all done in the mid-'30s.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. We—we have about a minute left. [unclear]. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming here. So is—is there any closing statement or statement of your—of your satisfactions over your life when you look at it that you might want to say before we close?

HAMAN: Well, [clears throat] I guess I'm proudest of the fact that I did 51 years with one company, 51 years of marriage, one wife. I have a son and a daughter.

LEVINE: Their names?

HAMAN: My son, Lawrence, Larry, is a juvenile probation officer out of Union County here. He's a bachelor. I think it's basically because he works with juvenile delinquents and he knows what it's like to have kids. [laughter]

LEVINE: And your daughter, her name?

HAMAN: My daughter [clears throat] is married and has two sons—my two grandsons, whom I took to Liberty Island and Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HAMAN: And—

LEVINE: And your greatest satisfactions? You're saying your children, your job—

HAMAN: Two—my grandsons right now.

LEVINE: —your marriage.

HAMAN: My grandson—my older one, my 20-year-old, is a sophomore at Rutgers. And my 15 year-old is a sophomore in JFK High School here in Lin—in [unclear]. Both of them are excellent students, honor students. Both are trumpet players. Both played in the [unclear] Community Band as trumpeters. Both of them got, as I said, honor student—

[END OF INTERVIEW]