

EI-116

MORRIS ABRAHAM SCHNEIDER

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RESIDENCES:

- **POLAND: KOSSOBER**
- **US: NEW YORK, NY**

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Sunday, November 17th, 1991. We're here today at Ellis Island with Morris Schneider, who came from Poland in 1920 when he was ten years old. Good morning, Mr. Schneider.

SCHNEIDER: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Could you please give me your full name, if you have a middle name in that--

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

SIGRIST: And your date of birth, please.

SCHNEIDER: All right. Full name is Morris Abraham Schneider. was born on May 3rd, 1910.

SIGRIST: Where were you born, sir?

SCHNEIDER: I was born in the little hamlet outside, twenty-five miles outside of Warsaw and the closest, the closest location where people could understand would be today, that we were just about three miles from Treblinka, which was, of course, one of the most brutal of all concentration camps. It was either number two or number three.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for us, please.

SCHNEIDER: Treblinka is T-R-E-B-L-I-N-K-A, and I was born in KossobEr. That's spelled K-O-S-S-O-B-E-R, Kossobor. It was a small hamlet and my father was born there. From there we went to a smaller hamlet by the name of Ostrovek. Now, to put it in retrospect, to--

SIGRIST: Can you spell Ostrovek, please.

SCHNEIDER: Well, as Ostrovek would be -O-S-T-R-O-V-E-K. And it was a tiny little hamlet, very primitive. It was like moving the clock back a hundred or a hundred and fifty years. We had no electric, of course, no gas, no modern facilities, no running water. We had an outhouse.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you moved there?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, I was approximately two years old. And my father left because he was going to be drafted again into the Russian Army. My father left for the United States in 1912. So, between 1912, between my birth of 1910, until I came to the United States through Ellis Island, I practically, for ten years grew up without knowing who my father is or was. And my mother took care of, I have an older sister, who's six years older than I am. I have an older brother who is four years older than I am. So my mother had to provide for the three of us. Now, we lived in a very, very primitive house. It was all one floor. And no kind of heating facilities whatsoever.

SIGRIST: What was the house made of?

SCHNEIDER: The house was made of mostly wood and we had, the floor was a dirt floor. If my memory serves me correctly, we just had a door and one window was one room. We had a basement or a cellar that we used to store perishable foods like fruit, primarily potatoes because that was our staple form of, that was our staple food. And we had no stores, no grocery stores. We had to grind our own corn. We had to bake, after we ground the corn into flour, the baker made the bread. We had very little meat. Our only meat that we had, primarily, was chicken. There was no such thing as any canned food and practically no fish.

SIGRIST: Did you raise your chickens?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, some neighbors, some people living around the area. We all,

more or less, lived in the same kind of houses. We were in prisons without bars because we were confined to an area. We, it was very primitive. We all lived more or less the same. We had the same life style. The bulk of the year, the biggest part of the year, we walked around barefooted because we didn't have any stores that we could shop and buy ready-made shoes, so we had a shoemaker who would make shoes from the leather that he got. And this is the way we lived.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the town for me just through the eyes of a child, what it looked like.

SCHNEIDER: Yes, there were houses. We had approximately between forty and fifty houses. They were all more or less the same. In our house we had a well that we would go to for our water. We had no indoor facilities whatsoever. A wooden floor, a door and a window and that was about the size of it.

SIGRIST: Were there churches in town, was there a synagogue in town?

SCHNEIDER: There were churches quite some distance away from where we were born, but, being Jewish, of course, a church was not, was something that we were not too familiar with. We were aware of them. As far as a synagogue is concerned, we had one or two houses that were a little bit larger. They had more than one room. And we would go and that was our synagogue. It was just another house, a little bit larger with, maybe, a few, oh, table and chairs, and that was our synagogue, that was our place that we went to for religious services. That was our focal point for the whole village.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Jewish population in this town?

SCHNEIDER: No. Being the town was very small, I would say about maybe ten to fifteen percent of the people were Jewish. The rest were, of course, Polish, Orthodox Catholic and many a time we were abused by them for our religious beliefs. And one incident that stand out in my mind when the Russians came into town, I must have been, oh, about five or six years old, and the Cossacks, who were very, almost savages, and they came on their horses, a lot of them were drunk, and we were all afraid of them, and they abused, killed, beat up anybody, any Jew that they caught outside in the town. And I know we had to shutter the one window we had. I, being the youngest and the smallest, hid behind, underneath the bed. My mother and my sister and my brother went into the cellar and we were scared, we were scared for our lives.

SIGRIST: Was this a frequent occurrence?

SCHNEIDER: No, this was the only incident because, again, this was just about the time of World War One, and the Russians were driven out by the Germans. There was one particular incident that I would like to go ahead and, I recall it as if it happened yesterday. I was very, very sick. We had no doctor, no nurses to take care of us.

SIGRIST: What were you sick with?

SCHNEIDER: Well, I don't know, I don't know. I was running a high temperature and my mother was very desperate. And at that time the Germans occupied our little town. And she went to a German officer and she told him of my, that I was sick. She didn't know what to do for

me. We had no pharmacies, we had no drug stores. And he suggested that she go into Warsaw, which was twenty-five miles away from our little town, and buy an orange and that eating the orange would make me feel better. And my mother had a great deal of hardship because we were extremely poor, went to Warsaw by horse and wagon and she came back with the orange, which I never saw in my life before. And I ate the orange; skin, pits and all. And, miraculously, I, within a day or two, I felt better. So (he laughs) this I remember. I also remember one incident where, the early spring, where my brother and I were walking and we were barefooted--we were barefooted most of the year--except when it got bitter cold, and if we had shoes we put on the shoes, they may have had holes in them, or else we wrapped our feet around with some kind of cloth for protection. There were no roads. Those were all country roads. And I was walking with my brother and either I stepped on piece of glass or on a sharp stone and my right foot started to bleed profusely. And it was bleeding and there was no way of stopping it, so I kept on walking and the, walking on the dirt or walking on the earth, I guess there was some kind of medicinal, whatever it was, walking on it that, the cut was quite deep, and it coagulated, the blood coagulated and there were no tetanus shots. We didn't know of anything of such a thing, and that too was an outstanding thing that took place as a child that I recall in our little town.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your parents. What was your dad's name?

SCHNEIDER: My father's name was Samuel.

SIGRIST: And what did he do in Poland?

SCHNEIDER: In Poland he was, more or less, a rabbinical student. He was married for a short time and, of course, it was the custom that the Polish husband would get a little bit of a dowry and his main purpose, being in a small town he had no trade or profession, he had a nice singing voice and he was a teacher and he performed the rituals of the high holy days and holidays. He was more or less the rabbi of the little town. And he had no profession other than just a knowledge and an education in Hebrew.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you describe what he looked like?

SCHNEIDER: My father was a short man. I would say approximately five feet, five inches tall, medium built, fair complexion, sort of blondish hair. A gentle, kind person, no outstanding physical features or characteristics.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about why he left in 1912.

SCHNEIDER: Well, he was conscripted to the Russian army. He served for a few years and when he got his release he felt that he would be able to pursue, start life or continue life in whatever direction, whatever his goal was and he ran into a situation where the army was going to go ahead and draft him again. Now, in those days, a lot of people, in order to avoid being drafted into the army, would damage, would either cut off a finger or do some kind of a physical damage to themselves so that they would avoid being conscripted for a physical handicap. My father felt that he didn't want to go ahead and do any physical damage to himself and he felt the best thing for him to do, at the time, was to leave for the United States, which he did approximately 1912.

SIGRIST: Tell me, what was your mother's name?

SCHNEIDER: My mother's name was Rebecca Silberberg, S-I-L-B-E-R-B-E-R-G, and her father and mother, my grandfather and grandmother, lived in a little town approximately five miles from where we were. My grandfather was a very dignified, very stately, very impressive individual. And he was quite tall. He was about five feet ten or five feet eleven with a beard, very imposing and he was looked upon in this, also a small town, with a great deal of respect and, of course, was highly regarded. And their home was more or less used as a community center in a small way and, also, where they used to bake the bread for all holidays and for the daily consumption. We had a large oven and they, we would bake the bread for the little community.

SIGRIST: I see. Talk a little bit about what your mother looked like and what her disposition was like.

SCHNEIDER: My mother was a little bit shorter than my father. She was, where my father was very gentle and sort of laid back, my mother, realizing the fact that her husband was in the United States, she was the mother and father. She had to provide for three children, three small children. And she was the bread-winner. She was mother and father. She was running the household. And, of course, shortly after my father left for the United States, Germany started to arch her back again and, in 1914 when World War One broke out, all communications, the bulk of communications with my father in the United States was cut short.

SIGRIST: How did this affect your mother and your life?

SCHNEIDER: Well--

SIGRIST: Had he been sending money?

SCHNEIDER: He was sending money, very little money because he was struggling in the States. He had very little money to send. He made very little money.

SIGRIST: What did he do? When he first got to America, what--

SCHNEIDER: Well, what happened, the people from the various little communities formed little associations, (unintelligible). And they would support each other and they had a few people that tried to communicate or tried to raise funds, but, in those days, it was very difficult to get money over, to send money, because of the war. And a lot of the banks, from what I found out much, much later, my very first job, while I still went to school at night, was in the old State Bank, which today is Manufacturer's Trust Company. And the man that worked with the old State Bank told me that when he worked in the foreign department, a lot of people would send money who had relatives in Russia or Poland, would send money. And the bank, in very fine print, had regulations and conditions that the bank was not responsible for any remittance of funds due to any war and so we never got any kind of money. He claimed that the bank kept the money. There was a good possibility that they did. But anyway, it was very difficult struggle and, but, we had no money, we had very little money, but we needed very little money because we had very little to start with. We had three basics, things that were more or less filled in a very primitive manner. We grew our own food. The basic and the

staple food was chicken and potatoes and bread. Clothing was hand-me-downs. I had an older brother who was four years older than I am and it was make-shift. Shoes, we had a local shoemaker make shoes for us. And there was a minimal need for money and we managed to survive. It wasn't easy but then life wasn't easy in those days. It was very primitive. It was very difficult.

SIGRIST: Did your mother do anything to bring in any kind of a wage?

SCHNEIDER: Well, she did, from what I remember, she did a little trading. In the town where my grandfather, well my mother lived, where her parents lived, once a week they had a large square and the surrounding areas, primarily the farmers, would bring their produce or whatever they had to trade and one day a week, in this large square, is where they would barter or trade or conduct any kind of business. And my mother, somehow or other, participated and was part of the bartering or trading in that little town.

SIGRIST: Talk to me, you've told me a little bit about your mother's parents, did your father have parents that you remember?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. My father had parents but, unfortunately, my father's parents, my father's sister and my father's mother, they were far more comfortable than my mother and my mother's parents were. And my sister, at that time, my father's sister rather, my aunt, when my father left the country, she didn't do anything to help, to help us. In fact, we were, my mother, in desperation, sent my brother to stay with my aunt, my father's sister and she practically threw him out of the house. She wouldn't have anything to do with him. So the relationship from my father's side, even

though financially they were better off than we were, they wouldn't have anything to do with us.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about growing up without a father in Poland and what did, because, obviously, you were so young when he left, you really didn't know what he looked like.

SCHNEIDER: Well, going back now, I could see growing up without a father was very, very difficult because love wasn't there, the companionship wasn't there. The going to a father for consultation, going to him to play with him, it just wasn't there. And, also, we didn't have too many Jewish children that we could call "playmates". I never knew I grew up, for my first ten years or for my life, I could guess, having children and grandchildren I grew up practically, the first ten years with practically no childhood. There was, it was boring. We went to sleep with the chickens. We got up with the chickens. There was very little in between. There was no playmates. There were no toys. There was no father to go to. And it was difficult. The memories were not very pleasant. It was something that I look back upon now that made me appreciate so much more when I met my father and when I started school. I had no schooling whatsoever in Poland.

SIGRIST: Is that also the case for your brother and your sister?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. The only schooling, we had no schooling whatsoever, other than knowing the Hebrew by rote. I mean, there was something where the teacher would go ahead and we had a handful of young children and the teacher or rabbi would have the Hebrew, would teach us the Hebrew lettering and the prayers. But it was completely foreign

because there was no explanation. There was no understanding of what we were repeating, what we were reading, what meaning was or anything of the kind. We were, I was illiterate until I came to this country.

SIGRIST: What were your chores around the house? Do you remember anything specific?

SCHNEIDER: Well, being the youngest, my older sister, more or less, was a surrogate mother. When my mother wasn't available, my older sister would take over. And I especially, more so than my brother, would look up to her. The chores were, well, we'd go out in the field sometimes in the early spring. If there were any berries, we'd pick berries or we would go ahead and there was a pond some distance away from us that my brother and I, there was no fishing, but it was the only play that can actually say that I had as a child. When the weather was warm, and we would go, we'd go wading in the pond. When the pond froze over we would make, make-shift skates; take a block of wood and if there was a very thick wire, we'd use the wire and use it as a skate. So this was the only thing as far as play is concerned that I could look forward to, as utilizing the pond in the winter and the summer for different things.

SIGRIST: It was a hard life. Not a lot of fun.

SCHNEIDER: It was a hard life without any fun.

SIGRIST: Without any fun. Well, let's start you over to America. (He laughs.) Let me ask you, what did you know of America as a child?

SCHNEIDER: Absolutely nothing. When we took my first plane ride, my first ride we took a train. We took a horse and wagon to the railroad station. There we boarded a train that took us through Warsaw and to Danzig, which is now called Gdansk, but at that time it was Danzig.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother telling you you were going to America?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. And America to me was absolutely the name, I knew of America. I knew it was a long distance away but I didn't have the slightest conception of what America was, where it was or what to expect out of it.

SIGRIST: Did you have a photo of your dad?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, we did. I had a photo of my father, one as a Russian soldier and then in civilian clothes, where he had a hat, at that time he was getting quite bald, and a long coat. And that was the only image I had of him.

SIGRIST: So at least you had something. You had some mental image.

SCHNEIDER: I had something, I had some mental image, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you pack?

SCHNEIDER: Well, we had nothing to pack to speak of. We had what we had on our back. We had, we didn't take anything to America, we had nothing to take to America. All we had to take with us was some bad memories, which we gladly left behind us, and there was nothing for us to take back to America.

SIGRIST: Now, you said you took a horse and wagon to--

SCHNEIDER: To the railroad station and there we got the train to Warsaw and Danzig.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been on a train?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, well tell me what that felt like.

SCHNEIDER: The train, of course, was an absolutely amazing thing and one thing that I, that really stood out in my mind as we were on the train. We were on the train for about an hour and then we heard a rumbling and a thunder-like noise and we were told that the rumbling and the thunder-like noise, which we never heard before, was, it had some skirmishes between the Russians. This was just about after the Revolution, but some skirmishes took back, military skirmishes, and we heard, well today I guess, it was artillery or some kind of barrage, military barrages. And we were glad to get away from that. And--

SCHNEIDER: Yes, this was the early summer. This was just about the beginning of August of 1920. We came to Rotterdam and I got to relate a very interesting thing. When we got to Rotterdam, we had, there was a little bit of a foul-up in documents. So, instead of taking the first boat to the United States, we had to stay in Rotterdam for two weeks until, finally, they were able to go ahead and get the necessary documents so that we could leave for the United States. Being stranded, and we were

isolated, we were set into an area, in Rotterdam, and we couldn't go outside of our area that we were supposed to stay. Right next to us was a factory. I don't recall what kind of factory it was but it was a fairly large one. And every day a number of horses and wagons, some of them would have two horses, some four horses, would pull up in front of this large warehouse and load up with whatever they were selling or transporting and go through, go over to the canal into Rotterdam proper. We, my brother and I and some other kids, would try to go into town too because, one, we were bored and, two, we wanted, I guess we were adventurous. And the policeman was always stationed on the corner and he would chase us. So, finally, my brother and I got the bright idea that two of us would stand on each side of the wagon and two in the back. And the policeman on the corner, the first two he would spot, he would chase and the other four would get around, would get into town. Now the reason we wanted to go into town, we started buying up candy and some other things in town and we figured we had a captive audience in the other immigrants and we bought some candy. And in those days candy in Rotterdam was quite good. So we bought some candy and we became young entrepreneurs and we'd sell the candy to the immigrants waiting for their ship to come in. And we were doing a very lucrative business but not having any sense of value, not knowing the various coins, we accepted only Polish coins, German coins, and some American coins. But, being very naive and, again, not being very good business people, in those days, if somebody would give us a penny or a dime, we would take the penny. And if certainly, if they gave us a nickel, we would accept a nickel before we'd accept a dime because the nickel was a bigger coin. It didn't have the value that the dime did, so we made some pretty bad mistakes in those days.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SIGRIST: So you were in Rotterdam two and half weeks you said.

SCHNEIDER: Just about two, two and a half weeks. Finally, all--

SIGRIST: Was this some kind of a, of a--

SCHNEIDER: I guess a detention area for the immigrants who were going to the United States. And for whatever reason, there must have been any number of reasons, whatever reason, they were detained until they could get the proper documentation and the proper clearance to board the ship for the United States.

SIGRIST: Were you examined at all at this area?

SCHNEIDER: No, this area we weren't examined. And when we got on the ship--

SIGRIST: Which was called?

SCHNEIDER: The Rotterdam. When we got on the ship, we had a filed day. One, I was never on ship before and it was absolutely, I was awed by it. It was overwhelming. All the people and boarding the ship, all a brand new experience. We left Rotterdam, we set sail about a half hour after the ship started, set sail, my sister got very sea sick. And it took us fourteen days to cross the Atlantic and in the entire crossing, she was in, we came in steerage. She was in steerage and the only time she came up for a breath of fresh air was just about a half hour before we saw the Statue of Liberty. Now the experience of the ship, being young

was an adventure in that particular situation, because we were on the lowest level of the ship. We couldn't go aboard. Some kids were more adventurous. My brother and I, we would sneak aboard, we were always chased. And we saw some people who traveled maybe in first or second class and we looked upon them as royalty, but we were confined primarily to steerage.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that was--

SCHNEIDER: Yes, the steerage was one huge place. It was the lowest deck. The stench, it was summer, in August, the humidity, the heat, having no air conditioning, having cooling facilities, it was hot, compounded by the fact that there must have been anywhere from two to three hundred people in that huge cavernous area. The body smells, the body odors, the lack of sanitation, the lack of any kind of facilities, washing, there was no such thing as washing or bathing. The stench, the vermin, it was rat infested. But, being children, I guess, had its advantages, in this case because we always tried to get out of there. We tried to go, get out of the steerage, get out of the babble of voices, get out of the heat and the stench and get on the main deck. We did have, we all were permitted to stay there for a little while but we were constantly chased. But the crossing went for us, for me in particular, went very quickly.

SIGRIST: What did they feed you on the boat?

SCHNEIDER: That, we had a lot of bread. We had potatoes. We had soup, uh--

SIGRIST: How did they feed you on the boat?

SCHNEIDER: Well, they had schedules and we'd line up at a huge table and they more or less ladled out the food in one huge plate and anything that didn't require a spoon or a knife or a fork, we just ate with our hands. Now, one thing that I was curious, never having been, seen any big, large body of water, when we set sail from Rotterdam we didn't know, we were arguing the various children that we became friends with, my brother and I, we didn't know, we felt water was water. And we said we could drink the water. So we managed to get some rope and we got a tin cup and we put the cup into the water and we took it up with the rope and we tasted it. It was quite salty. So we knew the water was not drinkable.

SIGRIST: What do you think your mother as thinking through this whole process of getting to the boat and on the boat? What do you think is in the back of her mind?

SCHNEIDER: In the back of my mother's mind, looking back today, she looked, one, to, of course, meet her husband, whom she didn't see for eight years; two, to, perhaps, look forward to an easier life for her, to be united as a family, where we could be together with my father; and, also, that my father, more or less, would be able to provide for her and it would relieve her of the burden of being father and mother to three children. She felt now she'd have her mate to share, to be part of the family. We would all be united.

SIGRIST: Was she anxious to leave Poland or do you think there was any resistance?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, no, she was anxious to leave Poland because the only thing that she felt she left, she had brothers and she had her father and mother. But I think leaving her brothers and leaving her father and mother, even though it was difficult, looking forward to and anticipating meeting her husband, who she didn't see for eight years, and starting a new life, perhaps an easier life and a better life, more than compensated for the fact that she had to leave her father and mother and her other relatives.

SIGRIST: I see. So you think she's anticipating. This is a good experience as opposed to a bad experience.

SCHNEIDER: I think, I think the good part was coming to a new world, a new way of life. She, the sacrifice was leaving her family behind her.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, and to me, seeing that statue, which I didn't know what it was made of, but that grand lady holding a torch, beckoning to people, welcoming them to a new way of life, I had no idea. I didn't know the significance. I didn't know the purpose, but, it was inspiring, it was very impressive. It was meaningful. It's the first thing that we saw as we came into the United States.

SIGRIST: When you were on deck in New York harbor and looking at New York City, now you've seen Warsaw and you've seen Rotterdam, which were big cities, but what, to a little kid from Poland, what did New York City look like?

SCHNEIDER: It looked like if I knew what a fairy land was supposed to look like, I

would say that New York City looked like a fairy land. It looked like a never, never land. It looked like something I never dreamt of. I could never picture it. I could never visualize it. It was beyond anything that I ever could possibly conceive being in existence. I had no knowledge. I had no schooling. I didn't read books. I had no pictures to look at. I had no yardstick to compare it to. I had nothing to compare it to. So it was all a fairy land, a make-believe world and, well, if my eyes could have popped, I guess they would have popped at the sight.

SIGRIST: As the boat comes into New York harbor, then what happens?

SCHNEIDER: Well, the boat comes into New York harbor and we came to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Ellis? Did the boat dock first of—

SCHNEIDER: No, the boat docked and, of course, the babble of voices, the pushing and the shoving and the straining to get through the doors and the mass of humanity and, it was chaotic. And we heard, there were rumors that we would have to go through some kind of a physical or health inspection. We also heard, particularly with the girls and the women, that they were looking, if they found some kind of disease or they found lice in their hair, or they found something that would, in any way, their eyes or whatever it was, if they found something that was questionable in regard to their health, they could be returned to whatever port they came to, whatever country they came to. And we were concerned because my sister had, I don't think it was glaucoma, but she had some eye problems. And my brother and I, my mother, we weren't stopped at all, but my sister was detained for about ten or fifteen minutes. And being detained ten or fifteen minutes seemed like

hours to me because, as I said at the very beginning, my sister was like my surrogate mother. And we, having heard the stories about people being detained for health reasons, we were concerned that she might be sent back to Poland. My mother was, being a mother, she was more concerned and more frightened than we were because we had some idea but not to the extent that my mother was aware of. But, luckily, after ten or fifteen minutes, my sister came out and we all got a clean bill of health. Now, we came into, of course, there were partitions. And they had government officials, U.S. government officials and we had to go through the various routines that took place at the time, the inspections, the routines, the paper work, the paper pushing. And, finally, when everything was cleared, we were taken into another room, with partitions, and my mother spotted my father. The only picture I had of my father was just a photograph when he was, when he left for the United States. And I thought, when my mother got excited, my sister who had the better memory of my father than I did, she got excited, I knew it was my father. My father had with him, he brought a bag of hard candies. And he threw the bag of hard candies towards me but, of course, my father was more or less a scholar; he wasn't a baseball player and it landed quite some distance from me. I had a cane with me, a simple cane, and somehow or other I got the cane and I was able to reach the bag of candy towards me. And, to me, that was my first contact with my father and the American sweets. Somehow or other that cane was very important to me and in many moves that we made, unfortunately, that cane was lost and, to this day, I miss that cane because, well, there was such a thing as a breach between the old and the new, this was breach, the bridge that we came when my father threw candy at me and I retrieved it with the cane. I miss that cane.

SIGRIST: Well, where did you get the cane? Do you remember?

SCHNEIDER: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: But you had it.

SCHNEIDER: I had it. Either my father had it, but I had the cane.

SIGRIST: Tell me about when they released you. Tell me about your mother seeing your father, and that reunion.

SCHNEIDER: Well, the reunion from my father and mother, of course, I, to me, it was all, I was absolutely bewildered at meeting my father for the first time, being in this huge and wondrous country and, I guess, in my own little way, I didn't pay much attention to what was going all around me with the other people. I didn't pay to much attention to my mother's reaction, to my father's reaction. All this was so awesome, so over powering that the memory of my mother's seeing my father or their reaction or their getting together and, unfortunately, I was preoccupied in my own thinking, my own feeling.

SIGRIST: When you saw your dad, were you excited, were you disappointed, was this the man that you had expected to meet?

SCHNEIDER: I was excited and I was expecting, no, it wasn't, I was excited because it was my father. I didn't know my father. So it was, it was no let-down, there was no disappointment. This was my father. I had ten years of catching up to do and I felt this was day number one, that I had a father

I could go to, I had a father I could call "Dad", I had a father that I could, if I was hurt, I could go to, I had a father, period.

SIGRIST: I see. So this was a very emotional kind of thing?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, it was and, well, I didn't pay to much attention to anything else but the fact that at long last, after ten years, I met my father and I was with my father.

SIGRIST: Where did you go after you left Ellis?

SCHNEIDER: Well, we took a ferry to the lower East Side and my father took us to the apartment that he rented for us to stay in and I was absolutely bewildered and amazed. This was a five story apartment, a cold water flat at 419 1/2 Cherry Street on the lower East Side. On either side of us was a stable. It was a walk-up. There were toilets on every other floor. I believe that we had about four or five families on each floor. We had no elevator and we came into this huge apartment, to me it was huge. It was more than one room. We had a kitchen, we didn't have a bathroom; it was every other floor. We had a bedroom and we had one living room.

SIGRIST: What floor was it on?

SCHNEIDER: This was on the fifth floor, the very top floor. It was a five story apartment and we had running water. We didn't have to go to the well. We had a stove and we had a gas, gas light and, I remember that we had to feed money into the gas meters in order to get the light, but all this was bewildering to me because it was all so fresh and new and so

luxurious and so completely different from that which we left behind in Poland.

SIGRIST: Talk about the neighborhood. What was the neighborhood like and who lived there.

SCHNEIDER: Well, the neighborhood was row of apartment houses after another and I found out many, many years later, only recently, I read Armand Hammer's book, and in Armand Hammer's book the very first page, he mentions the fact that his father, who was a doctor, lived at 416 Cherry Street, almost directly across the street from where we lived. Of course, this was, at least, ten or twelve or maybe fifteen years before we were there. So, the fact that he lived at 416 Cherry Street and we lived at 419 Cherry Street, it was a busy, typical East Side block. And then we would venture out and we became a little more familiar with our surroundings. We'd walk into other streets. We'd walk into, later on Clinton Street and Grand Street and, sometimes after, we were just a short distance from the Williamsburg Bridge, and after some months living in Cherry Street, I would walk across the Williamsburg Bridge and back again, which was quite an adventure. But--

SIGRIST: Was this primarily a Jewish neighborhood or of mixed nationality--

SCHNEIDER: It was primarily, I would say it was at least eighty percent Jewish. And another thing that I remember very distinctly, my father had a step=sister, who lived in Clinton Street, and my father's step=sister's husband was a shoe-maker. And all the people from the same town, the landsmen, would congregate in Goldfadder's Shoe Store. Now, his

place stood out. One, it was in the basement and he had a metal, well I guess it was a metal stand or sign and would have a boot on it and all the foreigners that came, we had no idea, a lot of them couldn't read, so they couldn't read the street but that boot in front of the stoop where Goldfadder had, that was the landmark and we all knew the address. And my grandfather's, rather my father's step-sister's husband, when we came over, and I being so young, he treated me royally. He took me by my hand, he took me across the street where they had a little candy store and he bought me two chocolate covered cherries. Now I never had anything insofar as candy was concerned in Poland. We didn't know any, we didn't have any candy. We had a problem just existing. We were satisfied when we could get something a little bit more than just bread or potatoes. So this was my second treat that I had coming to this country. The first was the hard candy that my father brought, the second was when Goldfadder took me to a candy store and he brought me the chocolate covered cherries.

SIGRIST: Tell me how your father in the eight years that he was here preceding your arrival, how he had Americanized. What was different about him because he had been in America?

SCHNEIDER: Well, yes, he, of course, Americanized and he also tried to grope and to search on how to make a living. So, he started first teaching and then he started doing what some of them--he didn't have any trade or profession--so he also did a little tailoring. But, primarily, he got a job. The very first year that he was here, in Red Bank, New Jersey, teaching Hebrew to some of the students, Jewish children in that town.

SIGRIST: I see. He wasn't doing that by 1920 though or was he still doing that in

1920?

SCHNEIDER: He was still doing it. He was still doing it. He didn't have any profession and when we came we lived in Cherry Street just for about a half a year. And my first, when we came to Cherry Street, I started school two weeks after we came here. And not having any kind of schooling in Poland, I started--I was ten years old and they put me into 1A. And I came and I was absolutely, no English, the only language I knew was Polish and Yiddish. And they put me, I was the oldest child in the class and, it was a large class, and the teacher told the class to stand up. I, not knowing any English, I didn't know what she was talking about and I was comfortable seated and I sat there. And she came over with a metal ruler and she whacked me across my arm. I don't think they could get away with it today but then they did. And she whacked me across my arm. I got up very quickly and I also realized that I had to learn English very quickly, too.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

SCHNEIDER: Well, after we lived in Cherry Street, my father, not having any trade, had a friend of his who was a business broker, and my father bought a candy store at 286 South Second Street in Williamsburg. And we lived in the back of the store. They had two rooms in back of the store, and we lived in back of the store. And I started, I transferred from the lower East Side to PS 15, Williamsburg, where they put me in 1B. It was, PS 15 was on South Fifth Street and from there I would walk five or six blocks to the candy store. And, my father still would go ahead and scrounge around for some teaching work he could do and my mother, of course, took care of the two rooms in back of the candy store. And

when school was over I would stay in the candy store and, whatever little business that we would do, I was, more or less, taking care of the store. Now I would leave, school was over at three o'clock, and I saw the kids playing--we had a playground--and I would play handball for about a half hour, and I knew I had to be in the candy store and take care of the customers, the few that came in. We, not far from the school was the library, the public library, and inasmuch as I learned how to read, a little bit anyway, I would go to the library and take out all the books they would allow me. And while, in between waiting on customers, I would read whatever books I took from the library and as I advance in my school--I got promoted a few times--I would, as I learned to read a little bit better, I would take out all the books I possibly could and I, after a while I would read O'Henry, Jack London, and all the adventures about the North and Alaska that Jack London wrote about. And I also would read about the various places in the Pacific and South Pacific and, what I did, I put more or less a little isolated nook in my mind of these beautiful places that I read about and I never felt, I never dreamt that I would get to some of them, but I did to most of them. I read about beautiful Bali and about Haiti, and these were far away places. I was an avid reader. And, so, when my father had the candy store and, of course, I would read. Where we lived, at 286 South Second Street, very few people in those days had a telephone. Now we had a public telephone and a public telephone was utilized by the people in the various apartment houses as a phone where they would go ahead and leave the telephone number of the candy store for people to call them, whether it was a job or social or a date or, they would hear from a relative. And, of course, when the phone rang I would pick up the phone and they would ask to speak to a particular person in our house or the next house. And I would get a tip; they would tip me for

bringing them. Many a time I would have to climb five flights of stairs and get maybe a penny or two, and if it was a very good call, a job or a boyfriend, and somebody would throw me a nickel, well then I hit pay dirt. That was a big tip. (He laughs.) And I also remember, when we lived in Cherry Street on the fifth floor, that there would be street singers, who would come in the back yard. And they would sing and people would wrap up a penny or two in a piece of paper and throw it to them or there would be a violinist and he would play, and that impressed me because someday I, in my childish memory, I'd say well, someday I'd play a violin and I would sing in the back of the yard and people would throw me some money, too. But when e moved to Cherry Street and I started making pennies and nickels and answering the telephone, I accumulated enough--

SIGRIST: Second Street?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, in South Second Street, I accumulated enough money, in two and a half years to buy my first suit from money that I saved. And I saved the equivalent of about twelve or thirteen dollars. And when I was thirteen I went to Stanton Street in the lower East Side, which was the market place for clothing, and I bought my own suit for about twelve or thirteen dollars, my bar mitzvah suit with two pair of pants.

SIGRIST: (He laughs.) In our remaining two minutes, I just want to ask you a final question, are you glad your parents came?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, I am for two, for some very good reasons. One, if not for my parents coming here, I just might be one of six million that was killed because a good many of our family was killed in the Holocaust. Two, I

was exposed to a new way of life, to a freedom that I never had before, to a possibility of reaching the goals, the objectives, reaching some of the things that I read about, that I dreamt about, and being able to achieve, and I had this opportunity here that I never would have had in Poland. I thank the good Lord, I, we, I traveled extensively. I've met some very interesting persons. I've driven cross country six times. I met Clark Gable. We were guided in the movie where they were shooting with Clark, Strange Cargo, with Clark Gable, I had his autograph. My wife got Jack Kennedy's autograph in Washington, D.C. I have three children. I have two girls and a boy. We have four grandchildren. And I think coming over here and being able to tell them the things that I had to go through, of missing a childhood, of missing so many good things, that they're fortunate. I'm fortunate to have been able to come here.

SIGRIST: Mr. Schneider, I want to thank you for coming all the way from California to come here and tell us your story. You certainly had an interesting life.

SCHNEIDER: Well, I smelled a lot of roses and I continue and it's still continuing to be interesting and the beauty part of it is that, in a small way, to compensate and to, as a reward, being an art dealer, I try to open up a door. I just met recently a young Russian couple, she's an artist. And I managed to get her on CBS and CBS affiliate in San Diego, where she got tremendous exposure. I managed to get somebody I knew in a newspaper, who wrote a beautiful about her. So, in a small way, I feel I made it a little bit easier for a foreigner who came to this country and who was able to benefit by somebody opening up some doors for them. I am grateful for that because I feel that I have, I'm repaying a little bit

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what I got out of this country.

SIGRIST: Well, I thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

END OF INTERVIEW