

EI-1301

HELEN LAZARUS

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HUNGARY, 1921

AGE: 11

SHIP: *CARMANIA*

PORT: CHERBOURG

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is December the 3rd, 19—[chuckles] 2003 and I'm here with Helen Lazarus, who came in 1921 (she remembers November 23rd, 1921) from Hungary at the age of 11. Mrs. Lazarus' birth date is 10/9/1910. And having a good memory, the port of debar—debarkation was Cherbourg. And the ship was the Carmania. And the little town that Mrs. Lazarus was born is something like Carachain [PH].

LAZARUS: Kiesa [PH].

LEVINE: And—and Kiesa is the river.

LAZARUS: No, it's where you stand as part of the town.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. All right. And so—and then I neglected to ask you, where did you settle when you first came here?

LAZARUS: In Manhattan.

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LEVINE: Oh, okay, and settled in Manhattan. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and Holden Leeds [PH] is here videotaping at Astria [PH].

LAZARUS: As a matter of fact, this fashionable East—wait a minute. The—

LEVINE: The part of Manhattan? Is that what—

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Is it the Upper East Side?

LAZARUS: Lower East—

LEVINE: Oh, the Lower East Side. Oh, great. What street? Do you remember?

LAZARUS: 385 East 8th Street.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Well, we're having a lot of people who settled in the Lower East Side.

LAZARUS: East Village—

LEVINE: East Village.

LAZARUS: —is what I was [unclear].

LEVINE: O—okay. Oh, that's great. You remember your address. Okay. [chuckles] Okay. Well, let's—in the—first, talk about life in Hungary before you came. You—do you have a—any mem—well, you—I guess you do. You have memories of the little town—

LAZARUS: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —before you went to Budapest.

LAZARUS: Very little.

LEVINE: What—what memories—when you think of that little place, what do you remember?

LAZARUS: Well, my mother had what's called now a general store.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: And naturally, she was very busy with that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: But she was a loving mother.

LEVINE: What was her name?

LAZARUS: Golda.

LEVINE: Golda. Ah. And you remember her maiden name?

LAZARUS: Frankel.

LEVINE: F-R-A-N-K-E-L?

LAZARUS: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And your father, was he also in that little town?

LAZARUS: No, not really. He came from another town but, at this point, he and two cousins decided they'll come to America. They want to see the lay of the land, if they could make a living and if they could practice their religion.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

LAZARUS: So they left their families and he left my mother with three children. I had a brother and a sister, who's seven months old—and came to America. Then they—the w—the First World War broke out and he was stranded.

LEVINE: Ah.

LAZARUS: Can you imagine being stranded in America?

LEVINE: So you couldn't even correspond during that period. Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: Wow. How old were you when he left? Do you re—did you remember him?

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: No, uh-huh.

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LAZARUS: Any man who would have come along, they said, "That's your father," I would have accepted it. I did not remember him.

LEVINE: Now, had your mother run this general store before he left or did she take—

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: —that up later? Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: It had originally belonged to her parents.

LEVINE: Oh,

LAZARUS: And special—it was too much for them to handle [coughs] so they moved up to Budapest, which was the capital of Hungary, because her son, my uncle, had a restaurant and she could cook.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: You know, people had to make do, use their talents. So my mother was left with a general store to run and it—it was—in retrospect, small towns, especially then, they were so unworldly.

LEVINE: [chuckles] In what ways?

LAZARUS: Well, let's say they considered people who couldn't read peasants. And there were lots of—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: And if they received a letter from their sons at—at war, they'd bring the letter to my mother; she should read it to them. And she in—they in turn, would come with a basket of eggs or something like that to repay her.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

LAZARUS: [unclear] was very nice—

LEVINE: [unclear].

LAZARUS: —and useful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you have any other memories about that general store? Anything else about it that sticks out in your mind?

LAZARUS: Not really because I don't believe I spent too much time in there. And my brother was away at school.

LEVINE: Oh, he was—he was sent away? Or he was in like a boarding school or something?

LAZARUS: Yes, a yeshiva.

LEVINE: A yeshiva. Uh-huh. So [clears throat]—so you went to school. There? Or, no. You w—didn't go to school till later?

LAZARUS: I'm just trying to remember. I don't think I went to school there. My mother taught us.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Later, went to school.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So was it typical for the boys to go off to a yeshiva? Was that—

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Because it was too small a town. They did not have a local rabbi who would teach the children, so they had to send them off.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: And it was very essential.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, I take it the family was religious.

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And was your town mostly Jewish people or—

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: It was a mix?

LAZARUS: No, it was mixed, more Christians than Jews.

LEVINE: And how were the relations between them?

LAZARUS: Well, it was cordial. You know what I remember mostly (I couldn't understand), you will hear people say their name was Gordon or something like that. There's one family, whose name was translated "lily of the valley."

LEVINE: [chuckles]

LAZARUS: And you know, to this day, I just love lilies of the valley. They're gorgeous.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So this was a Polish family?

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: Oh, a Jewish family that translated—

LAZARUS: A Jew—Jewish family—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Wow.

LAZARUS: They were referred to as the "Lilies of Valley." [laughter]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So was there anything visually about that little town that you remember, particularly?

LAZARUS: Yes. It had a—I don't know what you'd called it—running through a part of the land that was—how would you say it? They had piled up the soil so that it formed, like, a barrier—

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: —between the river so that in the event there was a flood it wouldn't [unclear] back to the town.

LEVINE: Mmm.

LAZARUS: I'm sure there's a name for that because I've read it in literature.

LEVINE: Like an embankment?

LAZARUS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that what you're thinking of?

LAZARUS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Oh. So was your childhood there a—a—a relatively happy one? I mean—

LAZARUS: Yeah, uh-hmm. As a little kid, yes.

LEVINE: And how would you describe yourself as a little kid? What was your personality? What was your temperament? What—how would you—what kind of a little girl were you?

LAZARUS: Well, I was free. I—especially, the summers were wonderful, running around in the fields. And we had a lot of fruit trees, especially plums and cherries. I used to climb trees, you know, like little kids do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So you had two brothers? No, one brother, one sister.

LAZARUS: One brother and one sister.

LEVINE: And where did you fall? Were you the oldest or the youngest or—

LAZARUS: I—I was the youngest.

LEVINE: The youngest, uh-huh. Uh-hmm. So did you observe any particular holidays or occasions in—in particular?

LAZARUS: I enjoyed the summer holidays because they had a—first of all, the foods were better, tastier. They—see, they used a lot of their natural resources in their diet. There was a lot of fruit and vegetables.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And to this day, their soups, cream soups are so good.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: I'm sure you never heard of string bean soup.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: They made a wonderful—

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And, well, I used to do it, make cherry soup during the summer.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: Except that I'd buy a large can [clears throat] of sour cherries, drain the liquid and set the cherries aside. Now, add sour cream to this liquid and mix it well to the consistency. You wouldn't want it too rich. And when you get the consistency you like, then add the cherries. Combine the cherries.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: It was wonderful, cool, and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So then your mother died and you and your brother—

LAZARUS: There was an epidemic.

LEVINE: Oh, the flu ep—epidemic. Could you say anything about that epidemic and—and—and the—the way it struck your little town?

LAZARUS: Well, all I knew is my mother was very sick. She was delirious. Funny how you remember these things.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: And—and she passed away real fast. And they notified my grandparents and her son, my uncle. He came down and he took us with him to his house. And that's where we stayed until my father sent for us.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: When they finally were ab—able to reestablish communications.

LEVINE: Hmm. So your brother was in Budapest, the one who went to the yeshiva? He was there?

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: And then you and your sister went there and stayed.

LAZARUS: Yes. And there [clears throat] we had wonderful treatment that, of course, my grandmother, she wouldn't let anything harm us. We were

given tutoring in German as well as Hungarian. And we stayed there over two years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: And then we came to America and, you know, my grandmother said—I'm never like this. I don't know—bringing it all back.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

LAZARUS: She said, "If you have nothing to read, pick up a newspaper on the street if necessary and read."

LEVINE: Oh. So you—it was just the three children traveling then?

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: And there was a problem with that because we were minors, even my brother. I believe you had to be 18, 19, whatever, to travel with minors. Now, it can be told, they forged our passports, birth certificates to establish that he was old enough. And so we were on our way.

LEVINE: And you had to travel. You had to travel through France?

LAZARUS: Yes. We had to travel to the port of Cherbourg. My brother was quite—in fact, he was a sharp kid. But beside that, [coughs] and I told you we were with—it—it was a large group of people that was sailing for America.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: And all nationals. So comes mealtime, there's a huge, long table and they put a huge bowl of potatoes and I don't know what else was in there. And these people attacked the food like vultures. Well, they were just hungry.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: They did not have enough food and came to us, there was none left for us. So my brother says, "Don't worry. Next meal, we'll go to the other table, the non-kosher table."

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Which we did and so got some food to eat.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: [chuckles] [sentence unclear]. They saw to it that little kids had a chance to eat.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, is there anything else about the three children crossing the great ocean in 1921 that you recall?

LAZARUS: Well, [chuckles] my brother and sister were seasick, [unclear]. No wonder. They were frying fish and the whole ship smelled of fried fish. It wasn't very pleasant. And so they were confined to their cabin and—but I had a good time. I had the run of the ship. I was running and I had a good time. And like I told you, I had chestnuts. The sailors filled up my pocket with chestnuts to munch on.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: But I forgot. I didn't [unclear]. While in Cherbourg, we were in this huge place where we slept, upper and lower bunks. First day, we're fine. You got examined, your head, everything else. Second day, you suddenly found we had nits. It was a ruse to get money out of us.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: Oh, sure. Because they couldn't let us get on the ship with lice in our heads. So we had to pay to get it cleaned up. We didn't have it.

LEVINE: You probably had it after you were on the ship from everybody else. [chuckles] Yeah.

LAZARUS: Just awful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Oh, we—we resented that. It was—because we knew we were clean.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, I guess the—the people who were immigrating were taken advantage of—

LAZARUS: Oh, absolutely.

LEVINE: —in lots of ways.

LAZARUS: Yes. They were. And it was not a very happy crossing. It was very rough, certainly not a luxury liner.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Now, were you in steerage as—or were you in third class? Do you know?

LAZARUS: Third.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So was it a—was it a cabin or was it a big room?

LAZARUS: A large room with double deckers. Through them, men were separated.

LEVINE: Now, so that meant your brother had to go someplace other than the—so then when you came into the New York harbor, do you remember that part?

LAZARUS: Yes, came into the harbor. This we learned later, that they sent a telegram to my father's house saying that we had arrived. But he jumped the gun and he left the house before the telegram arrived. And he went to the ship to find that we were not there. In the interim, my father's cousin came to the house. He wanted to see us and he saw the telegram. He opened it—and saying that we were at Ellis Island. So he came to Ellis Island to get us.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: And it was surprising that they released us to a stranger other than my father. However, I guess they weren't that scrupulous—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: —in those days.

LEVINE: Do you remember the reunion with your father?

LAZARUS: Very vaguely. He came with his new wife, who was well advanced in her pregnancy. And [unclear] it—it was difficult.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Because to find a stranger who turned out to be the storybook stepmother—

LEVINE: Ooh. You mean in the negative sense? Ah.

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LAZARUS: She was a horror. She just—you know, even at this late date of my life, I wonder how anyone could be so cruel to children.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: And I mean cruel.

LEVINE: You mean physically cruel or—

LAZARUS: [unclear].

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

LAZARUS: My father tried to combat her. He wasn't strong enough. She was strong.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: It even came to blows at one point. But he gave up. He saw no use.

LEVINE: Well, how were you with your father? Just without your new stepmother in the picture? I mean, did you have a n—nice relationship with him? Or you couldn't really—

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: Yeah.

LAZARUS: There wasn't any because he was—he was in between. He didn't know how to handle it.

LEVINE: Right.

LAZARUS: And things were not that great financially, which didn't help.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And you were in the Lower East Side at that point—

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: —when you first came.

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was your father doing for work then?

LAZARUS: A tailor.

LEVINE: Tailor, uh-huh. Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: And it was seasonal work. There was a spring season and a fall season.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: In between, nothing. And he wasn't that kind of a person who was—went out to look for work. Like his brother worked in a tailor shop between seasons doing repair work, alterations. Didn't happen.

LEVINE: Hmm. Oh, boy. Well, that must have been tough. So did you start school then in the Lower East Side?

LAZARUS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did you like that? How was that for you?

LAZARUS: I loved it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: I was a good student. [chuckles] Anything which was an escape from the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. So did you take advantage of—what is it? The—oh, I can't think of the name of it, the—in the Lower East Side they had those places where you went after school.

LAZARUS: Educational—

LEVINE: Educational [unclear]. Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: We did not have the time. She had her babies and we had to wash diapers, and we had to do things and run errands and clean the house. No.

LEVINE: Hmm. So you really came home from school and you had chores. You—

LAZARUS: Oh!

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Give you an example. School was around the corner, came home in lunchtime. She had a dozen errands to do, things to do. And after lunch, I remember once [clears throat] I had to go back to school. She gave me a nickel to buy a frankfurter and I ate it on the run. So I get in class [unclear]. It was—teachers were sympathetic. They knew.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: But—

LEVINE: So did you stay in school then? How—how far did you go? And when you stopped, what did you do?

LAZARUS: They sent us to work in a factory because money was scarce in the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: And I got a nickel a—a nickel over the week—no, a nickel a day for spending money. At the end of the week, she says, “What’d you do with the 30 cents?” I said, “I bought food.” “Were you accustomed to eating food?” I’m pulling now something [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Hmm. So did you get away as fast as you could? [chuckles]

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: My father had a sister who was an angel, you know, a real mother. We wouldn’t dare run away while she was around. I was scared in the morning when she got up, what kind of mood she’d be in. She went to visit her sister, who was a doll, in Pine Hill, New York. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [unclear] remember.

LAZARUS: While she was there, we flew the coop.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: My brother had left the house three months after we arrived in this country.

LEVINE: He went of on his own or—uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Couldn’t take it. Nobody could. An ill-tempered bitch.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: It's a horrible word to use but she was that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: So went to my aunt and she embraced us. She had two daughters, same ages we were.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: Wonderful. When she came back from the country, she made—she knew we had gone there and she came up to see, to get us back. “I want you to come back,” you know, using the same tone. It didn't work. My cousins were off on the side and they'd be shaking their heads, “Don't do it.” And—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LAZARUS: And she said some ugly things. It was customary, young girls, they'd use powder on their faces. She'd say to my aunt, “Look. You're making whores out of them.” And she, in her sweetness, she said, “Look in the mirror and see who looks like a whore.”

LEVINE: Hmm. Oh, you had a good ally to stand up for you. Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: And give you an example of cruelty and meanness. When her child was maybe a year old, she was holding him in her arms, and he was playing with a grapefruit. Believe me, we never got to eat grapefruit. She did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: So—and the child dropped the grapefruit, but before that he injured her nose with it before he dropped it. So what did I know? I picked it up and handed it back to the child. She was so furious with—oh, she was no more than—even closer than you are. She took the grapefruit, threw it in the pit of my stomach.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: I doubled over in extreme pain. My father was there. All he could say is, “Did you have to do that?”

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And never—never a nice word.

LEVINE: So then did she just leave and leave you at—at—with your aunt and—

LAZARUS: She had no choice.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So then were you able to stay with your aunt until—

LAZARUS: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Sure.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful. So—so—okay. So then what, you were working in the factory w—when you went to your aunt's house? Were you—

LAZARUS: Yeah.

LEVINE: So then did you stay there or—

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: —what happened then?

LAZARUS: Yes, stayed at my aunt—house because they too were poor and so I felt that was no more than right that I should pay for my keep.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: For my sister too.

LEVINE: Hmm. So then did you—did you change jobs or did you meet your husband and did you—what happened?

LAZARUS: [unclear] too young. You know, went to work when I was 14.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And child labor laws were not as stringent as they are now.

LEVINE: Was there an issue about that? About your working at 14? I mean—

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: No? Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: [unclear] works.

LEVINE: No. Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Nobody paid attention to how old you were or [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Except in later years, my father said he should have let me go to school. I was bright, he'd say, and I could the gone to school, become a teacher and teachers had the good, steady job.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: It always went down to dollars and cents.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you worked in this factory and then did you—did you move around?

LAZARUS: Changed jobs.

LEVINE: You changed, uh-huh. And let's see.

LAZARUS: I became a dental assistant. You wouldn't believe that.

LEVINE: Really? So you had to go to school. You went back to school. Did you or you didn't have to at that point?

LAZARUS: I didn't have to.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh.

LAZARUS: He was my dentist and I guess he saw a bright kid; she'd work cheap.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh. So did—were you still in the Lower East Side when you moved in with your aunt?

LAZARUS: No. Oh, no.

LEVINE: Oh, where were you—

LAZARUS: In the Bronx.

LEVINE: In the Bronx.

LAZARUS: Mmm.

LEVINE: And how was the Bronx compared with the Lower East Side?

LAZARUS: Well, a little more affluent, at least on the surface.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So were you a dental assistant when you met your husband?

LAZARUS: Yes.

LEVINE: And—

LAZARUS: Actually, I met him in the office.

LEVINE: [chuckles] He was a patient of your den—

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: His brother and [unclear] was a friend of the dentist's and when—they were from Montreal, by the way, my husband and his family. And this dentist said—he went to—on a trip to Montreal and he looked him up. "Don't forget. When you come to New York, look me up." Thereby, hangs the tale.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So did you like him right away when you first met him?

LAZARUS: Yes. I liked him but he—he was terribly persistent.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: He didn't take no for an answer.

LEVINE: No. So you were still living at your aunt's house when you were working for the dentist and when you met your husband?

LAZARUS: No, I—I used to shift between—my sister had gotten married in the interim.

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: And I had gone to live with my sister [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: And she lived close to where the dentist's office was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So what was your husband's name?

LAZARUS: Henry.

LEVINE: Henry. And—let me just see. Let's see. So just to sort of—so did you have children?

LAZARUS: No.

LEVINE: No children. And what has made you proud of yourself in your lifetime that you've done?

LAZARUS: [unclear] [pause] that I studied on my own.

LEVINE: Mmm.

LAZARUS: And strangely enough, I have friends who are college grads and I held my own, very well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: In some instances, more.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: In every field, the literature, music, opera, I was there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: My taste developed. I mean, it—it wasn't a conscious thing. It was, "This is what I want to do."

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did you have time after you married that you did—that you could not work? Did that—was that—

LAZARUS: I did for a while because my hours conflicted with my husband's hours. He wanted me home when he was home. So then I went to work for Metropolitan Life.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: Which was a mistake.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: But as a matter of fact, I taught English there for a while. We used to have high school students come in after work, after school, and their English was atrocious, just horrible. So they said, "Spend some time with them. See what you can do."

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: Because you see, as far as English was concerned, when I came to America—children are very cruel at times and they kept taunting me, "Greenhorn! Greenhorn!" And I vowed to myself, "I'll learn to speak English as well as they do."

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And so I was teaching these students. "Oh, you sound like a dictionary." You know. English sounded [unclear] because they spoke very poorly. They came of poor backgrounds. But—

LEVINE: Well, that's something to be proud of, that you had to learn English [chuckles] as a—as a person who came here from someplace else and then you were teaching it. It's quite something. So what would you say were—was the high point of your life?

LAZARUS: It's hard to say.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: I think travel. I enjoy traveling.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: My husband and I had four trips to Europe—

LEVINE: Oh.

LAZARUS: —and has seen most of Europe. And then when he retired he said, "Now, we have to see America." And we found America as beautiful as Europe, if not more so.

LEVINE: Oh, good for you. Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Just beautiful.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about the impact on you of having come from another place and starting again in—in this country, and the effect it might have had on the way you see things or your approach—

LAZARUS: Oh, my attitude is totally different. I don't think—take things for granted. It's not a question of money but it's just being that person and love of family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: My sister has—had two children. One was a son; one was a daughter. The son is gone and I saw this, reminds me of him. He is a world famous photographer.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: I don't know if you know they issued a block of stamps, the names of 20 photographers. His is one of them.

LEVINE: Really? Hmm. So you stayed close to your sister and her family?

LAZARUS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: He had a one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art.

LEVINE: What—what was his name?

LAZARUS: Gary Winnebrand [PH].

LEVINE: Hmm, I don't know [unclear]. Hmm.

LAZARUS: Unfortunately, a premature death.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: Cancer.

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, is there anything else you can think of, before we close, about—about coming to this country? About immigrating and living most of your life here and starting out with a very—I guess your—your

life at first was—was carefree but then it became difficult, and getting past that and—is there anything else that you would want to say about being here or what your life is—the meaning it had coming here or—

LAZARUS: Well, it—it's just that I had—I wish I had taken more advantage of opportunities. I had some but not enough.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Because the opportunities are so vast. Like you—talking about the—the Lower East Side having the Educational Alliance, there's a man at our atria who was a pharmacist. He doesn't stop talking about Educational Alliance

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: What it did for him.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Yeah. Hmm.

LAZARUS: He said he could have never made it, had it not the—the aid and encouragement he's gotten there.

LEVINE: No. Uh-hmm.

LAZARUS: Mind you, in a way, I had it. I had friends. I had one woman, for instance, who I met at work. And she was a Russian refugee but really very bright, and she encouraged my reading. I read all the Russian classics—

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: —by the time I was 18.

LEVINE: Wow.

LAZARUS: She was a vast [unclear] information.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, this was someone you worked with? Is that what you said? Uh-huh.

LAZARUS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah.

LAZARUS: And of course, music was another great love of mine. I don't know if you ever knew Lewison [PH] Stadium, which no longer exists, but in my—during my teen years that was our greatest outlet. On Saturday nights for a quarter you got—you were able—of course, they were stone seats.

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And Saturday [unclear] there were wonderful orchestras playing [unclear].

LEVINE: Hmm.

LAZARUS: And ballet. My husband loved ballet. I think I chewed your ear off long enough.

LEVINE: It's been wonderful. I'm so happy to have spoken with you and—

LAZARUS: [sentence unclear].

LEVINE: Yeah. We'll stop here and I want to thank you so much. It's a most interesting interview. You're—you—you're so articulate in the way you present this. Okay. So I've been speaking with Helen Lazarus and this is December 3rd, 2003, Janet Levine signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]