

EI-1330

NATHAN NASH

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RESIDENCES: RUSSIA: NEAR KIEV; U.S: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK; LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

LEVINE: Today is May the 18th, the year 2004. I'm here in Tamarack, Florida and I'm with Nathan Nash, who came here as a six-year-old in 1921 from Russia through Ellis Island. The family settled in Brooklyn—

NASH: Right.

LEVINE: —at first. And—oh, I should first say that they traveled on the Amsterdam.

NASH: Right.

LEVINE: That was the name of the ship. Okay. Well, if you would say for the tape, please, your birth date.

NASH: My birthday is August 16, 1915.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, you d—you—the microphone's going to pick you up so don't worry about this.

NASH: Oh, okay.

LEVINE: You'll be fine. Okay. [clears throat] And w—you—you weren't sure where in Russia you were born.

NASH: Well, it's—they say it's Kiester Gobania [PH]. Kiester Gobania means a town near Kiev.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay.

NASH: That's what it means.

LEVINE: Okay.

NASH: Well, you know, like—like you'd say Tamarack, part of Fort Lauderdale. That's what—

LEVINE: Yes.

NASH: —it is.

LEVINE: Okay, fine. And do you, personally, have any memories of life in Russia?

NASH: Nah.

LEVINE: No, no.

NASH: Mmm, nothing that I could even think of. I—it was so vague, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: As a matter of fact, I don't even have a memory of my father.

LEVINE: Yeah. Why don't—what was your father's name?

NASH: William.

LEVINE: William. And t—tell about him and what happened to him.

NASH: Well, I guess, what my mother told me, during the Revolution, they—he was shot and killed. You know, they were—the communists or whoever, the Bolsheviks went around killing people, and he was one of them.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: And he was left in Russia. They buried him and that's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So—

NASH: And we came here without him.

LEVINE: N—so did you and your mother live with your g—grandparents—

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —when you were in Russia?

NASH: No.

LEVINE: No.

NASH: My—my father had his own house. My mother and father had their own house. And my grandmother and grandfather were farmers. My grandfather owned one of the biggest ox—oxen—you know, where they raise oxen.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And his name was Handler [PH]. So they called him Oxen Handler.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: Because of oxen, yeah.

LEVINE: That was his first name, Handler, or his last name?

NASH: His second name.

LEVINE: His—Handler, uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oxen Handler. I—I see. So that was your mother's mother—

NASH: M—right.

LEVINE: —and father. They had a big farm. Do you happen to know what your father did before he was killed for work?

NASH: What was that? I don't.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I have no rec—I—I—it don't even picture what he looks like. [interruption]

LEVINE: Let's pause here. [tape turned off/on] So—

NASH: I have no recollection of him but my sister, who was three years older than me, always said to me, "Nat, if you want to know what your father looks like, he looks like Alex Trevet [PH]." You know, the guy from the quiz shows?

LEVINE: [chuckles] Oh.

NASH: "Jeopardy."

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: I—that's the only recollection that I have.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But after he—I never—he—I don't even have the faintest idea what he looked like.

LEVINE: I see, I see. Now, do you think your mother and father, their mother and father and the mothers and fathers before them—in other words, do you—were they in that area in Russia for generations, do you think?

NASH: Oh, yeah. All their life. All their life, they lived there. It's from generation to generation, you get the farm.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: You know, let's say my grandfather had one of the biggest farms. Where did he get it? From his father. And let's say there are three sons. The oldest son runs it and the others, they have room there. You know, each one has a house. There's no renters, no nothing. They live there. And they—usually, they all drift away. This one becomes an automobile mechanic. This guy does this. This guy does that. My grandfather started on a farm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And he had his children and that's it.

LEVINE: And do—do you—w—in other words, your grandfather, your grandmother, your mother and you—

NASH: And my sister.

LEVINE: —and your sister traveled together to this country.

NASH: Yeah, always.

LEVINE: And do you know why they left Russia when they left?

NASH: They had to leave because of the Bolsheviks were killing out all the Jewish people. So they all left.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: All the Jewish people left.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So it was really the Russian Revolution that sent them—

NASH: Right.

LEVINE: —packing, so to speak.

NASH: And brought 'em here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: And they came to the dock and they were aboard the ship and we went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Came to Ellis Island. They examined us.

LEVINE: Do you remember that at all?

NASH: Well, I remember coming and getting off the boat.

LEVINE: Do you?

NASH: [unclear] and my grandmother carrying me. She wouldn't let me walk. And that's it. But I remember going through Ellis Island, one, two, three.

LEVINE: Okay.

NASH: You know, they seen the kid, you know. The doctor says, "Let me look at you. You tuck your shirt up." And he says—give you a pat on the butt, you know, and that's it. But I had no problem. No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, when you got—was—were there other family members who were already here?

NASH: Yeah, the—that's how we came. My uncle, Sam, who was a very wealthy man, h—he and my grandmother were brothers and sisters. So when we came, he bought a house for my grandmother, a two-family house.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn?

NASH: Yeah, at 842 Dumont Avenue.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: And so—and we lived there.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did your Uncle Sam live near there?

NASH: No, he lived about two blocks away, you know. But they—see, at that time, when you get married, you always lived near your mother and father.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: See, not like today.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Even in Russia, it was the same thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: When you married, you know you're going to stay. And if not, if you don't, my grandfather would build a little house on the farm and they had that for you.

LEVINE: I see. Now, w—was your family a religious family?

NASH: I—my grandfather was what you call a Koin [PH]. That's the highest rate of—a Jew could be. There are three Jews. There's a Koin, a Levian [PH] and Israelite. The Koin is the top, Levian the middle and Israelite is the bottom. I'm an Israelite.

LEVINE: Now, how do you—

NASH: I'm the common—

LEVINE: [chuckles] How do you get to be a Koin?

NASH: It's through generations, the father, sons.

LEVINE: Now, do you have to have that name? Is that how it works?

NASH: No, no.

LEVINE: How—

NASH: No, it's—when you're a Koin, you—you're going to shul.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And they put your name down in the book and you are. Even on his tombstone, it's written that he's an honorable man. But me, I could never be that because I'm—I'm an Israelite. I'm like a type O blood, a common—that's it.

LEVINE: No, you're an Israelite because you don't practice the religion that much? Is that what makes you an Israelite?

NASH: No. I—

LEVINE: What makes you that? And your grandf—

NASH: An Israelite?

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Because there's only three different generations of Jews. Either you're a Koin—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: That's the top.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: You're a Levy [PH]; that's the middle. Or you're an Israelite. I'm—my mother and father were Israelites. So I automatically become an Israelite. The only one could become is the oldest son of my grandfather.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: He coulda hand it to him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But he can't hand it to me.

LEVINE: I see. I see.

NASH: And my father was an Israelite so I'm an Israelite. But that doesn't mean nothing. It doesn't mean nothing at all.

LEVINE: But do you practice? Did you practice your religion?

NASH: Well, I pray every morning and every night. I happen to—to be able to pray.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I—I pray in Hebrew and I pray in—in English.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And I—I know—I was brought up—my grandfather. He brought us up because when I was 12 years old, I lost my mother. So—

LEVINE: Oh—

NASH: —they raised my sister and I. And I would see him praying every morning. And he used to say, "Come on. You're going to pray with me." So I prayed with him and little by little, it got to be a routine.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And when I was 13, he was the president of the shul. So he says to me, "Come on. You're going to pray for your—for your bar mitzvah." And he said, "Be careful because the head rabbi from New York is coming down and you better pray good." So I says, "Okay." I was a little nervous to start but, once I got on the open air in front of the [unclear], I prayed and I davened [PH] and it was—everybody—the women threw little bags of nuts from—at that time, the women would sit upstairs and the men would sit downstairs.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: The women couldn't sit with the men.

LEVINE: Right.

NASH: And they would throw down little nuts in bag. My grandfather walked over—me, gave me a kiss on cheek. He says, "I'm proud of you." I says, "Thank you." And the head rabbi came over and kissed me. You know, that was a big honor, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: So when you were bar mitzvahed, you must have felt very pleased with yourself, that you had done something—

NASH: I became a man. I got long pants. Before that, you wore knickers. [chuckles] Yeah. Oh, yeah. I—my grandfather went out and bought me a pair of long pants, and my uncle bought me a suit. Oh, boy! [unclear] something, \$21 for two pair of pants—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: —and a jacket and a vest. Oh, yeah! At that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah. Then I went out. I went to school. And when I graduated high school, I took a walk in New York on the main street. I was walking around. This guy says to me, "Young fellow, you want to work for me?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "You clean you up the place," a wholesale shoe place. I says, "Okay." He gave me a half a dollar. He says, "You want to work for me?" He says—I says, "Yeah, I'm finished with school." He

says, "Six dollars a week, six days a week, a dollar a day." I says, "Okay." So I would go and give my grandmother three and I kept three. It costs me a nickel carfare, a nickel home, costs me 15 cents, a corned beef sandwich, club.

LEVINE: Wow!

NASH: Five cents a soda and five cents, french-fried potatoes. And that's what we eat, corned beef, hot pastrami, salami, either one of them. And I worked and I was doing good. Then I got ready—from a shipping clerk, I got on the floor and I was a floor salesman. And one of the salesman died.

LEVINE: This is in the same shoe place?

NASH: Yeah, same place.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And he said to me, "You want to go on the road? You know all the customers." I says, "Okay." So he gave me his car. And I went out. I went to Brooklyn where this guy—and the first day, I come out. I bring back eight orders. My boss jumped in the air. "Wow!" Mmm, so from then I was a salesman and I bought—joined the Local 65, and everything was good. And then I met my wife and she was 17 and I was almost 21, and we married.

LEVINE: How did you meet her?

NASH: Through a friend and we—we were introduced and—and we lived 61 years until she passed away.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: So she passed away in the year of 2000. And would you believe one thing? I never went out with any woman after that.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

NASH: You know, I said, "Hello. How are you?" But I never took a woman out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: I don't know why. But you know, when I—I was—she had been dead about a month or two, I'd get a telephone call. "Nat Nash?" I said, "Yeah." She says, "Well, I'm—I'm a widow and I'm very wealthy and I'm a

attorney, but I'm semi-retired and I own my own house. And my friend told me I should call you. Maybe you and I could get together." I said, "Well, right now, I'm still mourning my wife but if you give me your phone number, when I get through, I'll call you." She says, "No, I'll call you again." She never called.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: That's how women are so aggressive today.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I never met her after that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you never knew her?

NASH: Never.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: And I—I went and I—I went on the road for my boss.

LEVINE: When you—

NASH: And I did—

LEVINE: —went on the road, did you go beyond Brooklyn?

NASH: No, I went into Brooklyn. Then one time I went to the city.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And then one time, the Jersey salesman got sick so my boss sent me out to Jersey. But I didn't like that. It was so much driving between one cus—in Brooklyn, I put my car and I got, seven, eight stores. And I'd go into them. Then at that time, they would have been back in the store, "Hello, Nat. How are you?" And she would give me a kiss. He'd sit down and have a cup of tea, you know, and all. And in Jersey, you'd go to Newark. From there, you gotta go to Jersey City, a big ride. So I didn't want it but [unclear]—

LEVINE: So in other words, what would you do? You would show them samples?

NASH: Samples, and they would buy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: Then I was called into—then I had a son and then I was called into the Army.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And I was in the Air Force. I was there three months before they sent me overseas to Iran.

LEVINE: Wow.

NASH: I went to—I went aboard the ship called the Richardson. And I—for 29 days, we traveled in a convoy. Then all of a sudden, one morning we got up. We were all by ourselves and they went to Germany. And they were part of the Fighting 69, which was wiped out, and we went to Iran. See, I remember Iran called Persia. I don't remember the—called Iran.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And we arrived in Iran and there was all sand and the people, there was no water. Very—things weren't good. But we lifted—our job was to feed the Russians with ammunition to fight the Germans.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: So—then we closed the Persian Gulf command after nine months and we invaded Italy. So I was part of the Mediterranean Air Force. And that's what I was. Then in 1945, the end of '45, I got my discharge. I was a mail clerk.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And one day, I went out to get the mail and this commander said—calls me in, said, "Give me your right hand." I gave him. He put a handcuff on it with a big bag. "Bring it to your commanding officer." I brought it in and saluted him and he took it off. About an hour or two later he calls me in and he's laughing. I says, "What are you laughing about?" "You just brought your discharge papers." [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. [chuckles]

NASH: Well, but, you know, when it came to Christmas time, they all gave me gifts. They gave me envelope, whiskey, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: If I was single, I would—made it my career.

LEVINE: Really?

NASH: Because twice I was offered officer's training, and twice I turned it down.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: So—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: But I—I'm the type of man, I get along with—with everybody. One thing about me, when we were in the Air Force, when you talked religion or politics, I'd walk out.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: I don't hear nothing. I don't want to hear pro and con to nothing. I'd walk out. That's why I got along with everybody.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: I used to play baseball.

LEVINE: Really?

NASH: In the Air Force. So I played first base because I wouldn't run after a ball for nobody. And a guy played in shortstop. He throws the ball to me so hard it hits my [makes clapping sound]—so I stop and I walk over to him. I says, "What the hell's the matter with you?" I said, "You want to kill me? You want to break my arm?" I says, "What's the matter?" You know, and I'm cursing him, cursing him. He's laughing. The next day, he comes over to me. Who is he? A bishop in Catholic Church. Oh! Oy!

LEVINE: [laughs]

NASH: Then he became our chaplain.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: So when we went overseas, he was our chaplain.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: But he always used to say, "Nash, you son of a gun!"

LEVINE: [chuckles] So in other words, when you look back on that little phase of your life when you were in the Air Force, how do you think about it now? That whole experience of being in—in war and in—i—in the military?

NASH: [sniffs] I—I had no kick about being in the Air Force. To be honest, I enjoyed my life there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I mean, I had everything I wanted. I had a room with—three of us slept in it. One was a sergeant for the PX and the other one was for the food. And the fellow in PX used to come over to me, "Nashie, have a cigar." I says, "I don't smoke." You know, I never smoked a cigarette in my life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I never—how does—all right. So I put it in my mouth and he lights 'em. We're talking. The other one would say, "Have a drink." "I don't drink." "Have a drink." So I'd start drinking Scotch and that's all. When I came home, I'm—I'm walking to the house and I got [unclear] on my mouth. My wife says to me, "What are you doing?" I says, "I'm smoking cigar." "Take it out. The baby's here."

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: So that's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But I have no—I have no complaint. I—as a matter of fact, I really enjoyed it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And I went in as a private and I went out as a pri—they wouldn't give me anything because I refused officer's training. So—and—but my discharge papers called for a T5, because the work I was doing was—is the work of a T5, technical sergeant. So—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But I got along good. But I'm—the same thing here. I see something I don't like, I look the other way.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: You know, it's—life is what you make it. And if you don't, you're a—

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well, how did the Depression affect your family? Do you remember the Depression years?

NASH: 1939? Well, 1939 was—it—it wasn't—it wasn't that bad because we were about to go into war.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: Hitler was starting trouble.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And in '42, I had a uniform on already.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NASH: So it didn't affect me.

LEVINE: How about before that? Like in the early '30s, when people were—were losing their jobs and—and everything? Did that affect you and your family?

NASH: No. I always was working.

LEVINE: Ah.

NASH: I always worked for the same man, you know.

LEVINE: You—you kept working for the shoe—

NASH: The same man then. I wasn't making much money. I was making \$6, 7, 8. And then we had the Roosevelt where they—so I got 12. Then the union came in and I got 15. And then they sent me out on the road. I was making 24, 25, you know. But I always made a little money. I paid \$18 a month rent—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: —for three rooms, three floors up.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And you know—and, you know, you bought a—a big bottle of milk for a nickel.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: You know, it was cheap.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: But we got along. And that's it.

LEVINE: What about the union? Can you say anything about the union and—and what activities or how—how it was run or how it affected you and your job or—

NASH: The union—we had—we had a union, which wasn't strong at all.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: You know, where you had—we paid dues. I don't remember what it was. And they would negotiate with the bosses and whatever was, it was. Got a \$2 raise, a \$5 raise, you know. But—and then we got Saturday off.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: You know, so we worked—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: —five days. But we—the union was good. I think they went out of business, our union.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: They're not in existence anymore.

LEVINE: Well, how did your—how did your grandmother and grandfather fare in this country?

NASH: Oh, they did—well, they had their—m—my uncle always supported them and then they had their children go to work. And they supported them and the minute I and my sister went out, I always gave her half of my salary, whatever, until I got married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Whatever I earned, she got the same thing. But my sister—

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: I always gave my grandmother half. And, oh, we got along. I—we didn't—we were no millionaires but we managed to get along. And then to pay the tax at the end of the year, everybody chipped in and that was it.

LEVINE: And were they happy they had come here?

NASH: Oh. My grandmother was. My grandfather was a very brilliant man. The minute he came here, right away, he went to school, took his wife. And they went to speak English, read and write. Oh, he was a—a brilliant man. And she was right with him, right next to one, you know, like the old custom in Europe. She—he would walk and she walked in back of him.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: She never walked ahead of him. You know, that's—that's disrespect to the man.

LEVINE: Ah.

NASH: See, everybody has their own custom. [unclear]. They—everybody has their own custom in Europe.

LEVINE: Can you think of any other European customs that your grandmother and grandfather brought with them and they kept up?

NASH: Well, if you had a cold, they gave you a thing called guggla-muggla [PH].

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: They'd take a raw egg and warm the milk and mix it up and drink it. And you—I was your—yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, gee. I'll have to try that.

NASH: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: Oh, there's so many things that they had. They used to have—she used to sit around at—if you tell, you got a stomachache, come on in the bathroom. Right away then, an enema. That was the number one thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Anything that's wro—you got a headache? An enema.

LEVINE: [laughs]

NASH: And she was the boss, you know. She ran the house. Friday night, you came in from work. You had to tiptoe because the floors were washed and newspaper was all over the floor. Yeah. Oh, yeah. You walk up and you kiss her. "How are you?" You go and wash up there. And you sit down and you wait and everybody—you don't eat until everybody's there. Then nobody eats until she's down.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And then my grandfather would make a prayer and we all joined him. And then she picked up a napkin and put it on and took a fork in her hand, and then we ate. But nobody would eat before her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: So—

LEVINE: Yeah. What happened to your mother, that she died?

NASH: My mother, my mother, my mother. She was always working. And one day, she said to my mother, "I got a dropped stomach. I'm going in to have it done." My grandma says, "No, you don't need that." She says, "I want it done." [unclear]—

LEVINE: What do you mean, a dropped stomach?

NASH: A—a—woman trouble.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And so she went into the hospital on a Thursday afternoon. Friday morning, they called me at six o'clock in the morning. She got pneumonia and she's in bad shape. We went there. By 8:30, she was gone. Now, according to the Jewish religion, they can't keep her till after 12 on Friday because Saturday, you can't bury anybody. So they buried her; about on

11:30 she was in the ground. By 12 o'clock, we were home already.
One, two, three.

LEVINE: Wow. And it was from the operation that didn't work? Uh-huh.

NASH: She got pneumonia.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: And they—at that time, there was no cure for pneumonia. There was no penicillin. There was no nothing.

LEVINE: So—

NASH: And she just went.

LEVINE: Yeah. How did you take it?

NASH: Well, I was a ki—you know, I—my sister took it bad, you know. She was more understanding and I was a—I don't know—I was a boy. You know what.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: And my grandmother was—took it bad. My grandfather was a man, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: If he felt bad, he wouldn't let us know.

LEVINE: Yeah. S—

NASH: He was a very, very smart person. Very. And then he got educated. He kept going to school in United States. Very—

LEVINE: You mean he started—after he got the language, he kept going to school—

NASH: Right.

LEVINE: —for other things.

NASH: Kept—kept going to school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Well, he had nothing to do. He never worked.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: So either he went to school or he went to the synagogue. So he would go to school till three o'clock and then go to synagogue. And that was his day.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: And that was their life. They lived their life. He, when he was 97 years old, said to my grandma. He says, "While you're cooking, I'm going to lie down and—and take a rest." He laid down, turned [unclear] on his side and he went. Died like that.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: Then she couldn't live without him. She was heartbroken. Wh—wherever she went, she missed him. And about a month or two months, she passed away of a broken heart.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: But you want to know a funny thing? She always sat on the stoop outside and a whole—people'd go by, "Hello, Grandma. Hello, Grandma." She had a jet-black cat, a tomcat. The minute I went near her, she was, "Aah! Aah!" And the—when she died, two days later, we found the cat where she would sit. The cat was dead.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: [unclear]—

LEVINE: A broken heart too. Right?

NASH: I don't know.

LEVINE: Huh.

NASH: I don't know what they did with the cat. I guess they—people picked it up and took it somewhere.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: But she was buried next to my grandfather. So she was 95 and he was 97. So they lived a full life.

LEVINE: Yes.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: But they lived a good life, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: Then the kids grew up and they all gave him money, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: The boys and girls would bring him every week. One—one of my uncles was in the fruit business, brought him fruit. The other one was in wholesale groceries, brought him a box of oranges, ap—you know, eggs, whatever they wanted. But otherwise, they had—they were comfortable.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: And that's it.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —with your family. Your uncle, Sam, was here. W—and then did more relatives c—keep coming over or ha—were there other relatives already here?

NASH: Nah, I don't—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I didn't know after that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: After that, I'm the type of man, I mind my own business. I don't ask no questions.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: I just do my work and that's it. I—I never asked them whoever he brought over.

LEVINE: Okay.

NASH: You know, I always thanked him for what he did for me. But I never a—I never asked him. I never went out of my way to ask him anything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But there seems to have been other family members that—

NASH: Oh, I guess so.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I guess so.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I guess so. But I don't know if he had any other family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: [coughs] But he was very devoted to his sister, very devoted.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: They were very close in that family, and even my grandfather, with his children, very, very close. Very.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: And now, they're all gone. I'm the only one left.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: There is nobody there. I lost my son in the year of 2001. I lost my wife in 2000. I lost him in 2001.

LEVINE: Oh, boy.

NASH: Sixty-year-old boy, who spent five and a half years in the Air Force as a captain and 28 years with Gillette, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And seven years of the 28, he was their top salesman. He's got trophies and plaques and, oh, a wonderful kid. But—and that's why I'm here.

LEVINE: Ah.

NASH: Because I took it very bad.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: If he was alive, he would never let me come here. Never.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: But that's life, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I listen. I—and I—now, my grandchildren come to me. Like, I would go to my grandfather. Like, my granddaughter came over and she brought her boyfriend. She wanted me to meet him and I interviewed him, you know.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: I spoke to him. "What do you do?" He's a nice fellow, both college graduates, and then my s—grandson came from California, came with his girlfriend. And she is a legal secretary.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And she's going to go for law. So I approved of that.

LEVINE: I see. So now, you're the—

NASH: And—

LEVINE: You're the head of the family.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And then I had my other granddaughter, who just got married in Colorado. I couldn't go 'cuz the doctor didn't want me to go but I have a tape of the wedding.

LEVINE: Ah!

NASH: It was so beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: She married a Protestant boy but, ah! One of the nicest kids out. And they're going to build a house and he's one of—he and his father, mother and the brothers, so they—they had a marvelous—I seen the tape and everything was beautiful. So—

LEVINE: Why don't you say, for this tape, your wife's name and her maiden name?

NASH: My wife?

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: My wife's maiden name was [coughs] Horowitz [PH].

LEVINE: And her first name?

NASH: Harriet. Harriet Horowitz.

LEVINE: And then your son—you just had one son, right?

NASH: One son and one daughter.

LEVINE: Oh. And their names?

NASH: His name was Warren Allen Nash. And my daughter is living now. Her name is Carol Nash Cheshire [PH].

LEVINE: Okay.

NASH: You know, like a—a—

LEVINE: Cat.

NASH: —cat?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: That's her name.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you have several grandchildren, I take it.

NASH: I have three.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: I have two girls and one boy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. You want to say their names so—

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —we have it on the tape?

NASH: I have—Greg is the man. I have Michelle.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And I have—Greg, Michelle.

LEVINE: Is Michelle the one that got married? Is that the—

NASH: Janna [PH]—

LEVINE: Janna.

NASH: —is the one that got married.

LEVINE: Okay.

NASH: That's the three.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So can you talk about Brooklyn when you were growing up there?

NASH: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, what can you remember? Because a lot of the people who immigrated went to Brooklyn. What—what was it like for you and your family?

NASH: Well, Brooklyn was a place where I lived, was either one or the other. Either you were Italian or you were Jewish.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: You know. And I mingled mostly with the Italian bunch because at the age of 10, 11, I belonged to a gang already.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

NASH: Yeah. So—

LEVINE: Well, de—describe yourself. What kind of a kid were you? What was your personality like? What was your temperament like?

NASH: Well, I grew up with two of my best friends. One was—they were both Sicilians. And we went together and the father used to say, “These three are three mosquitoes. They don’t go without one another.” And we grew up together and we married, you know.

LEVINE: Ah.

NASH: But we had it nice. It was a nice upbringing. And I used to—at the age of 11, on Saturday morning, my friends would pick me up and we’d go to his father. His father had a whol—a grocery store. On the front was a stand and I was in charge of the fruit, and Mike was in charge of the vegetables. And Johnny would fill in the stock. And I, you know, “Oh, come on. There’s a special on oranges.” You know, they would have. Then 12 o’clock, we would stop and Mrs. Danapoli [PH] would give us spaghetti and meatballs or whatever she had there. Then when I went, she’d give me a half a dollar, and she gave me a bag of fruit to give to my grandmother.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: That’s it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But we had a nice life. We didn’t know—didn’t know—we didn’t have overabundance. But we lived in a normal life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And we got along good. Oh, I went with Johnny and Mike to the movies, a place called Stone Avenue [PH]. That was around 10 blocks away. And I'm walking with him and I see a black man. So I said to Johnny. I said, "What's that? The guy didn't take a bath?" I'd never seen a black man in my life.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

NASH: Never. You know, in Europe, you don't see them and in America, I'd never seen anyone, because over here, either you're Catholic or you're Jewish. So he told me and that was it. But I never.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. When you say you were part of a gang, wh—you mean you just hung out together or—

NASH: No, we had meetings.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: You know, we had a clubhouse in the basement.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: And we paid a quarter a week dues.

LEVINE: And what would the dues go for?

NASH: To pay the rent.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NASH: And we went and the girls would come down. And we'd dance with them. And if you like the girl, you walk her home. If not, you don't. They come down again; they come. They don't, they don't. But used to have a lot of girls coming down.

LEVINE: And what—

NASH: And—and then you go in the back. There was all couches. [makes smacking sounds]—

LEVINE: [laughs]

NASH: You know, how y—young there. So you kiss a girl, that's a big, "Ohh!"

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

NASH: You know, it was—we were kids.

LEVINE: Did you go to Coney Island?

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was that like?

NASH: I'll tell you what. I had a f—friend of mine. We were 20 Sicilians and 2 Jewish boys, me and this other fellow, Georgie Schlossman [PH]. His father and mother owned a paint store next door to Johnny's father, the grocery. They had a truck. At that time, he would take it on Sunday morning and we each gave him a dime. He used to get 10 or 11 gallons of gas for a dollar. For a dollar. And we'd go aboard the b—the truck. Two of them would sit in the front. The rest of 'em sat in the back. You head to Coney Island. You had a pair of pants and, underneath, your bathing suit. And we got down and we jump around, enjoy ourselves. Then we go into Nathan's. It was right near there. So you got a hot dog for a nickel. You got corn for a nickel, french-fries for a nickel and soda for a nickel. That's 20 cents. And you had a—now, you don't bother with no girls until you finish eating.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: Once you finish eating, then you go with the girls, you know. Ah—ah, we used to have fun. Ah, we used to grab a hold of a girl and take 'em and throw 'em in the water. And they—we'd scream, "Ah, [unclear]!" They'd say, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: And that was—that was a big life there.

LEVINE: How about the amusement park? Did you go to that?

NASH: Yeah, we went to Lunar [PH] Park, the steeplechase. Ah. Thrifty things. You'd get 20 or 25 rides—

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: —for 50 cents. Don't forget. This goes back years and—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: —years ago.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

NASH: Now, you don't know what they charge for it. I remember the subway was a nickel.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Now, you don't—

LEVINE: Two dollars.

NASH: At the George Washington Bridge, at the beginning was a quarter, then a half a dollar. Now, I think it's six or eight dollars.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Yeah. So—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: But life is peculiar. But life is what you make it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember when people started getting cars, more and more?

NASH: Cars? I didn't have a car because my friend, Johnny, had a car and Mike had a car. And I didn't—actually, I didn't need it. But once I was—started to go on the road, I gave my boss back his car and I bought the other one. My boss gave me money and I paid him back. And I got—the first car I bought was a Studebaker for \$17.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

NASH: And my friend, Johnny, picked it up. I used it for around seven months and then I got a '32 Chevy in '34.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And I paid \$167 for it. But I had to go up to Sing Sing or to one of these penitentiaries. And I gave the money to the warden. And the man came out and he signed it and I got the ownership. I'd go in, Wade [PH] Street, where I worked. I hand it in. I want to get my license plates. I'm called in, the FBI. "What is it?" "This car was stolen."

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

NASH: So they took the car for two weeks. They said, "We're going to cut the upholstery." I said, "Do whatever you want." But when I want it, boy, beautiful. When I got it back, I had all beautiful upholstery, everything. They couldn't find it. It was used in a holdup but they never found the money.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: That's my car and I had that car from—about six years and then I got another car. And then I went into the Army. When I came out, I bought an Oldsmobile, and that's it. Then I—I was working wholesale and then they—one day, they came over to me and said, "Nat, there's a retail store in Hempstead, Long Island that's very good. It's—they are going bankrupt. Go in there." So I went to the auction and I put in a bid for the store and I won.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: So I was going to use it for a month, use all the—sold the stock. But I started to getting stock with the people I knew. And all of a sudden, one week I'm doing three times the amount that he did before. I kept it for 29 years.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: So that's why you moved to Long Island?

NASH: Yeah. I first started, I—we moved to Levittown—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: —which was very good. The—the house was 7,99—\$7,999. I paid \$54 a month and I was paying off my mortgage.

LEVINE: Were—were you one of the first occupants of Levittown? Was that—

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —just being built then?

NASH: [unclear]. We bought four houses together, four. But we—we were all GI's. Everything was under GI Bill.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: So—

LEVINE: Can you say anything about Levittown? Because that's—that's quite a—a phenomenon, that place.

NASH: That place was gorgeous. Whatever you had—it was a potato patch. Whatever you had, grew.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And we grew there. All of us, you know, started getting—and I had a son and a daughter. You know, they were small. My son belonged to the Boy Scouts. My girl was Girl Scouts. And we all grew up. It was a good atmosphere. And the [unclear], every Fourth of July, everybody put on the uniform and they marched all around. Ah! Big deal! Big—and then we would stop and the women would have coffee and drinks and donuts. We used to go in the donut shop. They used to donate donuts and every—ah, but we led the good life.

LEVINE: Now, when you say “four of us,” in other words, you knew these other people when you all moved to Levittown together?

NASH: My brother-in-law and sister-in-law, my cousin and her, and my friend. They bought the houses. We put a hundred dollars down and we got back the hundred dollars when we moved in.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, were you working in the store in Hempstead when you—when you—

NASH: No.

LEVINE: No.

NASH: I was just doing wholesale but then I gave it up and I took the store.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: And then I had one man to work for me. And he was good, you know. And one day, I said to him, “I want you to do a window.” He says, “I’ll do it when I got time.” I says, “I didn’t hear you.” He says, “When I got time, I’ll

do it.” I said, “Not—when you work for me, you do it when I tell you.” He’s—“Then I quit.” I says, “Okay.” And I had—I hired—hello, Sweetheart—and that’s it. I made a living. Then we sold the Levittown house and we moved to Bethpage. I moved there because Grumman’s [PH] was eating up all my taxes. So I—

LEVINE: What was?

NASH: Grumman. The Air Fa—

LEVINE: Oh, Air Force.

NASH: So then I had a beautiful home there. Beau—and I lived there all my—all the time. And when I sold that, I moved here.

LEVINE: I see. What would you say you’re most proud of that you’ve done in your life that makes you feel a lot of satisfaction about?

NASH: Well, we traveled. My wife and I, once my children and I were married, we would take a month. I went through Europe. I went through Israel. I went to the Caribbean. I went all over.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And when she was dying, she said to me, “One thing, I have no regret.” She said, “Wherever it is, we went all over.” We lived a very—for 61 years, we lived a full life.

LEVINE: Mmm.

NASH: So—but we—we had a good life together, you know. The children were good. They both married and they’re—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you think the fact that you came here—let me just move this a little bit. Do you think the fact that you came here as a six-year-old from another country and your family immigrated too, do you think that had an effect on you as far as the way you saw the world or the way you looked at things or your attitudes about things?

NASH: Nah.

LEVINE: No?

NASH: That had no effect on me. I’m the type of man; I am what I am. You got to accept it for—in me for what I am.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I don't put on no airs. I don't tell you about the millionaire and all this. Nah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I'm just a plain, ordinary person who just gets along.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: And same thing here. "Hello, how are you?" You know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

NASH: But, you know, they listen to some story. This guy had 50 stores and this guy—th—that's a lot of—you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I just listen to it and I shake my head, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

NASH: But wherever you go, you'll find people. And that's what life is. You got to accept people for what they are.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: You know, they get people come over me, "Nat"—ask me questions. I answer 'em the best [unclear]. If I can't, I says, "You better see somebody else." They think I'm there for godfather, you know. And some people aren't all there, you know. So—but this is a place that's clean.

LEVINE: Yes.

NASH: It's nice.

LEVINE: Very nice.

NASH: And the people here are nice. They wor—the help is nice.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I have no complaint about nothing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: The only thing I complain about is the money I got to pay every month.
Boy!

LEVINE: Expensive, huh?

NASH: Ah, \$2,550 a month.

LEVINE: Wow.

NASH: You know, that's—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: But you got everything. You got medication. You got everything you want.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: Are you married?

LEVINE: No. No, I'm not.

NASH: You lost your husband?

LEVINE: Well, I was divorced.

NASH: I can't—see, when I was young, we never had that.

LEVINE: I know. It's—

NASH: Never in my life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

NASH: We never had that.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Well, it's a modern world. Today is different.

LEVINE: Yeah. You must have seen a lot of changes in the world. Are there any other things y—that come to mind that are really different now than they were when you were growing up—

NASH: Oh, people are different.

LEVINE: In what way?

NASH: Well, people are—where we were, there was a different thing. We were all family. We were considered as a family. If you were a friend, you were family, you know. And my grandmother would sit on the stoop and, “Hello, Grandma. How are you?” And walk by. Some boys would kiss her on the cheek, “Hello, Grandma.” And some kids will bring her a [unclear], you know. She was that k—a fixture.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And everybody—but it was more of a friendly atmosphere. You know, “How are you?” Knew—you knew the—the children, the grandchildren, everybody.

LEVINE: Hmm.

NASH: But now it’s a different thing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: I have kids come in. This one comes from Colorado. This one comes from here or from there. You know, it’s—it’s a different world. They stay for a half hour, give you a kiss, “Okay. We’re going here. We’re going there.” “Okay.”

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: It’s not—not like it used to be.

LEVINE: Right.

NASH: And the women would cater to the mother and now, it’s a—the women are working. Some women are making more than their men. So that’s how it is. But I’m glad to be here and that’s what it is.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember anything about the Yiddish theater when you were growing up?

NASH: The Jewish theater? Yeah. I took my grandmother and grandfather to Second Avenue to—y—

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Yeah. Oh, it's all. Sit down and there on the stage, and my grandmother's crying. My gr—I said, "What are you crying about? There's a"—"Oh, you're a—you're such a child. You don't want—know nothing. You don't know"—my grandpa got tears in his eyes. And I just—"I don't know what's the matter with you? You're supposed to be intelligent people and you're crying."

LEVINE: You mean—

NASH: And they enjoyed crying.

LEVINE: You mean it brought back memories?

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that what it was that—

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —they were—uh-huh.

NASH: It was always—always sorry about a mother that's sick, a mother dy—you know, was always sad stories.

LEVINE: Oh, they were? They [unclear]—

NASH: Yeah, always—always sad. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And then they used to have comedy also, you know. So—

LEVINE: Yeah? Let's see. How about the Victrola and records and immigrant music of the Old Country? Did you have anything to do with any of that stuff?

NASH: Music?

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: Nah, we would always—

LEVINE: [unclear]—

NASH: —sing, the group of us. We sang, you know, and we had a—a radio in the clubhouse.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: And we had a Victrola there. But there at home, we had a radio but we used it so seldom.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: But mostly, they'd get together and the boys and girls would sing, you know. But—

LEVINE: Like, in the clubhouse, would you have records—

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —that you would dance to?

NASH: Oh, yeah. We had a radio and we had records that we danced to and— and it was nice. And then little by little, they started getting married. This one got married. This one got married and this one had to go here, and this one to Jersey. One went to California with Gallo Wine.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

NASH: You know, it was all—and this guy got promoted; he had to go here. And little by little, then we disbanded.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: But we were all together because when we started, about six months later, we all went to church and the priest cut our finger. And we became blood brothers. But that's a Si—Sicilian custom.

LEVINE: Ah.

NASH: And we became so, "We are one and we are a family." And even today, we're a family.

LEVINE: Do you still keep contact with them at all?

NASH: No more.

LEVINE: No more.

NASH: I haven't heard from them for—most of them must be dead now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: Because they were all older than me.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

NASH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh—

NASH: But most of them must be dead.

LEVINE: So was that—did that—was that something that meant a lot to you, that you became blood brothers?

NASH: Oh, sure. We were very, very close. Very—oh, we always—we always, in a group, we went to eat together. We didn't have a—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

NASH: But I associated with the other two, mostly. The three of us all went together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: I went to their weddings. I went to their sisters' and brothers' wedding.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: So—

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

NASH: We were very close, very close.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: And we—I had a nice life, growing up. You know, clean, nice. I met a lot of individuals when I was young. I remember I was on the [unclear] and Frank Costello came.

LEVINE: Oh.

NASH: It was a big car with four men, and Mrs. Danapoli s gave me a rag and I wiped it. I must have been around 10 or 11 years old. I [unclear] his car.

He gave me a dime. Oh, yeah. I met him. I met a few of these big shots there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NASH: My—I never spoke to them, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you think your mo—would you say that your mother and your grandparents—did they have an idea of American dream about this country? Is that something—

NASH: It was—it was a necessity.

LEVINE: Ah, uh-huh.

NASH: They didn't know where they were going, but they knew that my Uncle Sam was here for them. But they didn't know what they were coming to.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

NASH: There was no dream; there was no nothing.

LEVINE: I see.

NASH: They had to accept it for what it was.

LEVINE: Right. And that's the way you are now.

NASH: That's all. I accept everything from what it is.

LEVINE: Yeah.

NASH: I live—I'm the type of person, I live every day. I live day for day. My grandfather always taught me, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow isn't here yet. So live today." I live every minute of the day. And that's it. And I enjoy my life.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a beautiful place to end this interview.

NASH: [laughs] Okay.

LEVINE: I want to thank you so much. It was a real pleasure.

NASH: And my—and my pleasure.

LEVINE: Okay. I've been sp—I have been speaking with Nat Nash, who came here at six years of age in 1921 from Russia. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]