

JONAS: A very small village near Minsk, and the name is Stansa Nigarela.

HEID: Can you remember to spell that?

JONAS: Oh, I'll do it in the English version. I couldn't remember the other way, but my imagination that it's N-I-G, uh, A-R-E-L-A.

HEID: Okay. Now, you said it was a small town. How small was it? A few buildings, or farmhouses?

JONAS: Farmhouses, but there was a railroad station within walking distance. And several of my uncles would give me money. We went to the railroad station to buy our candy and waved to the passengers. It was a happy moment.

HEID: So you just had the railroad station and some small buildings around. That was the town itself. So the railroad station had a small store inside of it?

JONAS: That's correct. It was like a social meeting.

HEID: Oh, that's great.

JONAS: Because we, there were children around. I had grandparents. And we were warmly taken care of. I remember the house that we lived in. I remember during the wintertime we

used to sleep on the side of the oven for warmth, and they used to do their baking in this big oven. It was a huge room, and we played in there. It was the lifestyle at that time.

HEID: Well, tell me a little bit more about the house. How many rooms did it have?

JONAS: I can't remember the separation, but I do remember that part where we slept during the winter months. The size of it, that has faded in my memory.

HEID: Was it a small house, a large house?

JONAS: You see, each, the grandparents had their home, and then the children lived in their own little homes around the area. So it was like a homestead, you would call it today. See, that was the style. Now, when I went back to Russia two years ago and we were on the bus, and I couldn't remember how the house looked. But when I saw so many of them, and the painted green, with the little flowers, I remarked to my roommate that it's quite possible that I lived in a similar house when I was in Russia as a child.

HEID: So then your grandparents owned a large piece of property?

JONAS: Yes, yes, yes.

HEID: Do you have any idea how large?

JONAS: No, no. Those things were not important at the time.

HEID: Could you state your father's name?

JONAS: Yes. Alex Nathan Sacharoff.

HEID: And what did he do for a living?

JONAS: When he came to the United States? He was in the garment trade. Then he left that and went into business for himself and he was a shoe repairman.

HEID: What did he do in the old country, though?

JONAS: Oh, he made shoes.

HEID: From scratch?

JONAS: He not only, yes. He was a craftsman in shoes because when we came to the United States I remember seeing the shoe forms, wooden shoe forms, and he would make shoes for my mother.

HEID: And what was your mother's name?

JONAS: Fanny, and Kilfin was her maiden name, Sacharoff.

HEID: And do you know how to spell that, Kilfin?

JONAS: K-I-L-F-I-N.

HEID: And what did she do?

JONAS: Housewife.

HEID: Now, you mentioned earlier to me that your father had left while your mother was still pregnant?

JONAS: The reason that he left was to avoid going to the service.

HEID: Well, tell me about that. What happened?

JONAS: That was about the only thing that I could remember I was told. In fact, my mother was pregnant with me. So he never saw me until I arrived in Ellis Island.

HEID: When did he leave Russia?

JONAS: Then he must have left the year that I was born. If she was pregnant and I was born in December, so it must have been the spring of 1921. I mean, no, I'm sorry, of 1913, because that was the year I was born. I came here in 1921.

HEID: So that was a long time span.

JONAS: Yes. It was the First World War. Oh, that was really rough on us.

HEID: What did your mother do? How did she make a living?

JONAS: My mother? During the war years she, illegally she was selling salt. She had it under her clothes, and she would sell that to make the money, and that's how she supported us.

HEID: Now, you mentioned you had a brother also.

JONAS: Yes. My brother is thirteen months older than I am.

HEID: What is your brother's name?

JONAS: Louis.

HEID: Okay. And now she meant, you, she sold salt? Where did she obtain that from?

JONAS: I don't know. But we heard, and we knew that she used to sell salt.

HEID: And that's how she supported you and your brother?

JONAS: Yes. That's how she made a little money.

HEID: Now, what about your grandparents? You had your grandparents living on the same farm as you were.

JONAS: Yes. I remembered my grandfather. My grandmother died during the influenza, and I don't remember her at all. But

I do recall my grandfather.

HEID: And what was your grandparents names?

JONAS: Uh, grandparents? Oh, uh, my father, my mother's, oh, no, well. That was Howard, Charna in Jewish. That was his name. My grandmother, I don't recall. I don't know if anyone really was named after her. So I truthfully can't say.

HEID: So in this time period here you are, you know, a very small child with an older brother and your mother's selling salt to support you. Now, in the meantime, your grandparents are helping support you also?

JONAS: That's right.

HEID: So did you stay with your grandparents?

JONAS: Yes, yes.

HEID: Did they feed you?

JONAS: Yes. But, see, we had it very bad during the First World War. I must have been about four or five years old. And the family became separated. We travelled during the night, slept during the day hidden in barns until a family who knew of my grandfather, they took in my brother Lou and me as their grandchildren. They hid us. The neighbors reported that she

was harboring two young children.

HEID: Well, this is, can we back up a little bit? What, do you remember like the night you had to leave?

JONAS: No. That I don't remember because it was so sudden.

HEID: Was it because the soldiers had come?

JONAS: Yes. And we just were dispersed from the village entirely. Everyone went their own way. So we were left behind. We got separated from my mother. Just Lou and I were together.

HEID: Now, what happened to your mother at this period?

JONAS: My mother, she managed by herself wherever she went. Whether it was with part of the family or alone, she never told us. All we remembered is what happened to the two of us because Lou and I were very close and the age as well as we were together. And this particular Gentile family took us in and she really did save our lives at the time. Because when the soldiers came in to look for us, we were hidden in a closet. She fed them food and drinks until they were intoxicated. They didn't find us, and they left.

HEID: Do you remember the family's name?

JONAS: No.

HEID: How long did you stay with them?

JONAS: I can't remember how long we stayed until the village was taken back and then everyone started coming home, and then we found each other.

HEID: Oh, so you were able to go home to your village?

JONAS: Yes. And we went back to my grandfather's house.

HEID: So the house was still there?

JONAS: Yes, yes. It wasn't destroyed during the time that I was there.

HEID: You're very lucky.

JONAS: In the meantime, mail was being sent back and forth to my father. He saved up enough money and he sent for us, and that took until 1921.

HEID: Well, talk about now, life on the farm. Did you have animals? Did you, you know, crops?

JONAS: I'm sure we did. Yes, and vegetables and farms, ordinary. Nothing commercial. It was just enough for the family and the children and the grandchildren in that little circle.

HEID: So how large of a family was it? How many people? Do you remember?

JONAS: My mother had three brothers and a sister who was married at the time and she and her family and her husband went to Roumania. She lived in Bucharest because I used to address envelopes for my mother. They wrote to each other.

HEID: So this was your mother's parents you were staying with.

JONAS: Yes, yes.

HEID: Now, what about your father's parents?

JONAS: My father's parents were in a different village. I don't recall them at all.

HEID: So you never got a chance to visit them?

JONAS: No. Because I lived always on my mother's side of the family, so I don't know them.

HEID: Do you remember anything, uh, what about cooking? Did your grandparents do the cooking or did your mother do the cooking?

JONAS: Well, I would imagine that my mother did the cooking.

HEID: Do you remember any type of food?

JONAS: No, not particular. We were very fortunate to have food.

HEID: So in other words . . .

JONAS: Whatever we ate, it was there from the farm. Nothing was purchased.

HEID: So were you better off than the other people in the village, or . . .

JONAS: Perhaps, perhaps.

HEID: Because it sounds like a large farm.

JONAS: Yes, perhaps. But I couldn't really say so, no.

HEID: Okay. Uh, what about religious life?

JONAS: There was, of course. Of course, it was. When I came to the United States, naturally, I went to a private teacher.

HEID: But in Russia, though, was it very strict?

JONAS: (she pauses) We celebrated holidays, yes. We did. We celebrated holidays. Everything was, my brother was bar mitzvahed in the United States. That he got a pen like

everybody else in those years. (she laughs)

HEID: What about school? Did you go to school in Russia?

JONAS: Oh, yes. No, no.

HEID: Not in Russia?

JONAS: No, no, no.

HEID: So there were no schools available?

JONAS: Went directly to a public school when I was living in New York, yes.

HEID: So you had no education in Russia whatsoever?

JONAS: No. Most likely a religious education.

HEID: But there was nothing available?

JONAS: Because there were men in the house, and we just, there were no books or anything like that. It was just when I went to public school. I went to . . .

HEID: Do you think it's because of, is it because the village was too small to have a school or . . .

JONAS: Mostly likely.

HEID: Or was it because of your religion?

JONAS: Most likely. I don't remember a schoolroom at all. Not until I came to the United States.

HEID: Talk about the people in the village. Were they all Jewish?

JONAS: No, it was mixed.

HEID: It was mixed?

JONAS: Then why would a Gentile family take us in?

HEID: That's true. That's true. So you really, did you experience, was there prejudice there?

JONAS: No, no. No, none whatsoever. They got along very well, very well.

HEID: So not until the soldiers came.

JONAS: There wasn't any. No, not among the village people. Maybe outsiders would come in and be rude but no, we never felt it, no.

HEID: All right.

JONAS: And in public school in the United States everything was, we were a mixed group. The Lower East Side you had every nationality. There was never any prejudice. I didn't meet it

until I was an adult, unfortunately.

HEID: Now, you mentioned to me before that you were separated from your mother for a period of time. So I imagine you were reunited with her after the war and you went back to the village.

JONAS: That's correct.

HEID: Now you also mentioned your father saved up money. At what point, your mother decided to go to America?

JONAS: Well, the, they were at, much more at ease. They were, my father requested for us to come to the United States because he felt it was time. The war was over and he was lonely, and he wanted to bring the three of us. And we got as far as, uh, Holland, Amsterdam. We were supposed to be leaving from there, but in the interim my brother had an infected thumb and he couldn't pass the physical. So we had to stay behind. He was hospitalized. I remember the hospital clearly. And we had to wait until it healed.

HEID: Okay. Can we backtrack just a little bit? How did you get from your small village to the point where you were leaving?

JONAS: Oh, we had, we had a Russian visa we started with.

But when we reached a certain point and the delay was caused we lost our Russian visa and then my mother applied for a Polish visa. She had relatives living in Warsaw. So there, again, there was a delay.

HEID: Did she lose the Russian visa on purpose?

JONAS: No, no. Because her passenger time was for this particular date and this particular ship. But when the infected finger delayed us, so we had to wait, and we applied for, the earliest visa was through Poland. And she had family in Warsaw, so we stayed with them, and then we were permitted to travel.

HEID: Now, who was in Warsaw?

JONAS: My mother's relatives. We stayed with them.

HEID: And you remember staying with them?

JONAS: Oh, yes. I remember staying there, yes, I remember. When you asked me how big was the kitchen, this was a, on each floor there was the kitchen, and everybody did their cooking and their own, whatever they were cooking for themselves. And then it was brought back to our little room and we ate there.

HEID: So it was like a little apartment building or . . .

JONAS: Yes. Like a little community, and that was it. And

like I mentioned too, the ghetto, the gates, I remember very well the gates. We had to stay inside. We couldn't leave after a certain hour. If we were outside of the gate and the gate was closed we weren't permitted in. So we always played near the gate so as to be within our living quarters.

HEID: Well, tell me about it. This is the ghetto in Warsaw.

JONAS: Yes, yes. That was the ghetto.

HEID: Do you remember what it was like?

JONAS: Well, I remember it was what we would call now high-rise. Several floors, stories high. And I made a trip to Russia two years ago and one of our tour stops in Warsaw was the ghetto. (she pauses) It was a terrible experience for me, because I remember. We were young children and we were happy, we were playing. We didn't know what was in store for us. And then when I was, I saw the marker, and a small square of grass. That was the reminder how that area was destroyed. (she is moved) (she sighs) It really broke me up.

HEID: I can imagine. As a young child, though, do you remember, were you able to go in and out of the gates yourself or . . .

JONAS: No. Everything was destroyed, there was nothing left.

I asked the guide who took us for this tour if they had any old pictures. I would have recognized it. He says, "Nothing." The entire city was destroyed. We saw a film, "The Destruction of Warsaw." It was complete. (she sighs)

HEID: But as a . . .

JONAS: I shudder when I think of it, how many people died.

HEID: I know.

JONAS: Unnecessary. War, anyway, is very cruel.

HEID: That's true.

JONAS: When you have to go through it.

HEID: But think back, now, when you were a little girl, though, you didn't know this. What was it like? Were you able to, because, I'm sure, did they have guards at the gate?

JONAS: Yes, yes. Sure. They knew where you were living.

HEID: So as a little girl were you able to go back and forth?

JONAS: Oh, yeah. Yes, we used it as a playground. We were, we weren't afraid of anyone at that time. There was nothing to fear.

HEID: What about your mother? Was she afraid of being there?

JONAS: No, no. She was, we were all, the three of us were looking forward that we were going to America to join our father.

HEID: So how long did you have to stay in the ghetto?

JONAS: I don't know whether it was weeks or months. I don't remember. But I think it was part of the summer because we didn't have any heavy clothes when we arrived in December of 1921 in the United States. And my father immediately took us and bought us American clothes. He discarded all the European things that we brought with us. So we were gradually getting into the community.

HEID: Okay. So you were delayed because your brother had an infected thumb?

JONAS: That was the only reason that caused the delay.

HEID: Now, did they do an examination when you tried to get on the boat and . . .

JONAS: Oh, you were thoroughly examined. My, yes.

HEID: No, not here. Now, this is . . .

JONAS: Before we boarded the ship. That's why we were delayed. You couldn't get on the ship because of that infection.

HEID: Okay.

JONAS: We were deloused. Of course.

HEID: You mean, in Warsaw?

JONAS: When we came here, I remember that part, too. We were deloused here.

HEID: But you were deloused on the other side?

JONAS: Ooh, the long hair, and my mother was constantly washing our hair and keeping us clean, and that's why I say when I was crying I had this little handkerchief that I went to wash. And . . .

HEID: Before we get to that, now, let's go back to Warsaw with your brother's finger that was infected. Did he have to go to the hospital for it?

JONAS: Oh, yes. Yes, I remember.

HEID: Do you remember the hospital?

JONAS: I remember the hospital. Yes. It was a high building

and the staircase was open four squares and we could look down and look up. And I was constantly running up and down the stairs while my mother stayed with my brother Lou.

HEID: And what did they do for your brother Lou?

JONAS: The nail was removed.

HEID: So you had to wait for that to heal?

JONAS: That's right.

HEID: So now you then went to the port again to get, you got your new visa.

JONAS: Yes. We got the new visa and we waited for a space on the ship, and that's how we came on the Carmania. At that moment my mother knew when we were leaving, and she wrote to my father.

HEID: And what month was that, when you got on to the boat?

JONAS: Um, on that passport picture there is dates. That little . . .

HEID: Well, you have here October 2nd, so it was in October.

JONAS: Yes. October when we left, yes. And we came into the United States in December of that, 1921.

HEID: Okay. Well, how about telling me some of the things, how was the boat ride? What was the boat like? Where did you sleep on the boat?

JONAS: I think we slept on a, oh, how would you, like a net, in layers. Similar to the one that is here.

HEID: So it was like a hammock?

JONAS: Yes, yes. That's how we slept here, too.

HEID: So, but on the boat you were in steerage, I assume.

JONAS: Yes. Of course, of course.

HEID: And was . . .

JONAS: We ate whatever my mother said was all right for us to eat. It wasn't a luxury trip. (she laughs)

HEID: I didn't think so. Do you remember what you ate on the boat?

JONAS: Mostly it was hard boiled eggs, and we got an occasional apple.

HEID: Did you have to go to a dining room, or they just handed out the food to you where you slept?

JONAS: I don't remember a dining room. No, I wouldn't be positive about that. It's very vague, because it was, it was just a mass of people. And whatever you wore and whatever you had was with you. We didn't have any luggage or anything like that.

HEID: Now, in your sleeping arrangements, how many people slept in the same room as you?

JONAS: I don't remember. I know it wasn't private.
(she laughs)

HEID: That must have been hard.

JONAS: But you survived, and we were young. I survived.

HEID: And how was the voyage? Was it very rough?

JONAS: Rough? Oh, yes, that time of the year.

HEID: Were you seasick?

JONAS: We arrived in the cold, cold weather. And the first time that I saw the Lower East Side once I got off the ship was drums, huge drums, and fire in it. And they were standing around and warming their hands, and I thought it was so dirty, because I never was in a big city. So many people.

HEID: So, now, let's go back to the ship. You're on the

ship now and this, you're on there for about two months, two-and-a-half months.

JONAS: No, not quite that long. I don't know why there was such a difference, when we got permission to leave, and actually time that we boarded the ship, I don't recall. The only way I could find out is maybe the arrival date and try to trace it, then we would know exactly the date that we boarded.

HEID: But you were aboard for quite a few weeks.

JONAS: Yes, yes. There was a time lapse. I was thinking, after I saw the card on the ship, I says, it would be a good idea, the Cunard Line, to find out, to backtrack. It takes a lot of time and effort, but I imagine it could be traced. And the spelling of our name I'm sure was different on the passenger list. Because when we were registered for school, we made it easier for us, and they spelled it the present way, the way it is spelled. I'm sure it was a little bit more elaborate.

HEID: Now, going back to the boat, do you remember when you came into New York Harbor?

JONAS: Oh, yes.

HEID: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

JONAS: Oh, yes. Of course.

HEID: What did you feel?

JONAS: We were all elated. Oh, it was such a thrilling moment to know that we arrived. We're going to be on land soon. And the trip was so long from the time that we left the little village. But we were taken in by my mother's family. She had three aunts living at that time, and we were part of the entire group.

HEID: So now after seeing the Statue of Liberty, they then take you to Ellis Island.

JONAS: Yes.

HEID: By ferry. Do you remember Ellis Island?

JONAS: Well, I remember the huge room that we were sitting and waiting to be called. I remember that. I remember a lot of activity going on. It was rushing, rushing. People were leaving. Some were staying behind. Everyone was eagerly awaiting for the person who was going to meet them. It was emotional. I was bewildered. I never saw that many people after living in a little town, so it was exciting, when I think of it now.

HEID: And did you know English at that time?

JONAS: No, not a word. When I was registered in school, it was the registrar who gave me my American birth date, because we had no birth certificates. My mother guided us by holidays, and I was born six days before Hanukkah that year. We knew that Mama's birthday was the last day of Passover. That's the way we understood it. So they spelled, they gave me my English name of Sylvia because my Hebrew name was Shimka. They gave us that particular year, six days before Hanukkah, was December 12th, and all my legal papers and everything is December 12th, 1913 and my legal name was Sylvia Jonas until I married.

HEID: And how do you spell your Hebrew name? Was it Shimka?

JONAS: In Hebrew, I couldn't tell you. I would pronounce it in English, Shimka. So this was all given to me.

HEID: So you're on Ellis Island, and you didn't understand a word of English.

JONAS: No.

HEID: Did they have translators for you?

JONAS: Oh, I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did. Because the questions that they asked us, we had to answer. They had to match to what my father knew about us.

HEID: Do you remember them asking you questions?

JONAS: No, I don't remember because there was like a separation between us and we weren't permitted to say anything.

What my mother said to us was, "Stand up and show your father how tall you are." Well, I stood up. My brother didn't. He was very shy. And then a guard between us, so that we wouldn't give any signals. I don't know why they did that. But my father saw how tall I was.

HEID: I'm sure you stood very tall for him.

JONAS: Yeah.

HEID: Because that was the first time you saw him.

JONAS: Uh-huh.

HEID: The first time he saw you.

JONAS: That's right.

HEID: A very special time.

JONAS: He was a very special man to me.

HEID: Well, now, before you get to the point of seeing your father, just talk about, I mean, you're in this great big hall, and I assume there's a lot of people.

JONAS: Yes.

HEID: Is there anything that stands out in your mind at that time?

JONAS: No.

HEID: Is there anything special that you saw that you never saw before? How long did you stay on Ellis Island before your father came?

JONAS: It must have been days at least because everyone was dispersed. Everyone was accounted for from that ship. And we were still there.

HEID: So you were the only three left behind on the ship?

JONAS: Yes. Well, probably by that time there was another ship that came in. But I don't recall that at all. The only thing is that I knew I was there alone, and that we would have to go back. Papa didn't come for us.

HEID: Okay. We're going to pause now one moment while Kevin changes the tape, okay?

JONAS: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

HEID: Now, we were just talking about when you came, got off the boat and came to Ellis Island. We're talking about how crowded it was. Now, what happened? You stayed there for a couple of days. Do you remember eating food at Ellis? Did you have any meals there?

JONAS: Oh, yes. We ate, we ate. That was, they had to feed us. What we ate, I couldn't remember, but we, mostly we survived on was potatoes and the eggs.

HEID: Did they call you into a dining room?

JONAS: (she pauses) I can't picture that at all. I remember the sleeping quarters more so than the food part.

HEID: Tell me about the sleeping quarters.

JONAS: Well, they were, again, hammocks, hammocks. And we went up into this huge room and we were together. That's about all I could remember. And most of the day we were in this huge room running around, waiting, waiting. There was nothing for us to do, actually.

HEID: So was your brother allowed to stay with you?

JONAS: Oh, yes. Of course. My mother wouldn't leave him out

of her sight. No, her two children? No. We were very close together, but there was nothing for us to do except childish things to do. My brother Lou and I have always been very close. My younger brother, there's a difference in our age, but that never spanned. You know, we became, as we got older, we became closer.

HEID: So now you told me earlier that you got separated from your mother and brother at Ellis.

JONAS: Yes.

HEID: Tell me about that.

JONAS: Well, that was the time during the First World War.

HEID: When you were on Ellis, you said you had to go . . .

JONAS: Oh, on Ellis Island. Oh, I'm sorry. That was the day that I was crying and I was telling my mother that I think we'll have to go back, Ma. Papa doesn't want us. And we will have to return. They're not going to keep us here. Oh, I cried. And I went to the lavatory and I was busy washing my handkerchief. At that moment, the name was called that my father was there for us. Oh, everybody became hysterical looking for me. They couldn't find me, so finally they did, and that was a hurry-up job, and that was, then we were called into another room. Again

we were questioned and then my father was questioned, and then we were released, and we went to live with an aunt.

HEID: So this is the first time you saw your father.

JONAS: Yes.

HEID: What did it feel like?

JONAS: I was thrilled. I was thrilled. I couldn't take my eyes off him, because I knew that was my father. That was it. And like I said we, he made us discard the clothes that we came in and he took me separately and he bought me an outfit for everything that was needed and then he did the same for my brother Lou, and he dressed my mother all in American clothes, and then they, he took us and registered us for school, the public school.

HEID: But on Ellis Island you were separated, you couldn't run to him right away.

JONAS: No, no. I had to wait. This guard stood in front of me, and he wouldn't allow us to, just to say, you know, to show him that I was thrilled to see him for the first time. So I had to wait.

HEID: So finally then they released you and then you were all . . .

JONAS: Yes, they released us, and the family was together, and we went to stay with this, my mother's aunt and we went to school. My father got us an apartment. The apartment was furnished. We lived in the Lower East Side. Oh, about a year-and-a-half. And then he went into business for himself in the Bronx.

HEID: And what did he do?

JONAS: Shoe repairing. He had a store with his brother, but then he went out for himself. And we went to public school.

HEID: And what was your first apartment like in the city? Was it a small apartment?

JONAS: It was just a plain room. The toilet was outside. It was on a single floor. It was used by everyone. And we had a very small apartment, but when we moved to the Bronx we had a much larger apartment. We had our own bathroom, we had a living room, a dining room. I remember a dining room because that's where we ate when family got together. Then we moved to a much larger apartment. And I went to high school. I went through high school. I took special courses. And I was married when I was twenty years old.

HEID: Now, you said your father took you and registered you

for school, and you didn't speak any English at that time. What was that like?

JONAS: (she laughs) That was funny, because the teacher, I'm sure the teacher didn't know Yiddish, and the children helped. They asked me and I answered them until we were able to communicate. Children do, they become very friendly. They became very close. And my aunt didn't speak much English either, so it was a little hard. But I fitted right in. My mother went also to school. My mother really was amazing. She went to school, she learned English, she was able to write a letter, she read the newspaper, and she got her own citizen papers. I admired her for that.

HEID: That's something you could be very proud of.

JONAS: Her letters are so precious. We have them because I lived, after I got married I lived in Chicago, I lived in Massachusetts. I lived in many places. My brother, my older brother lived in Florida. Mama used to write him letters in English. But she, her spelling was amazing because she wrote the way she said it. The letters of the alphabet said the word for her. The only way you could have read her mail was reading it aloud. And we found it to be so interesting. It was hilarious. When we tried to spell the word it didn't make sense, but the phonetics was there. And that was the beauty

part of it. I tell you, she was really great. Ah! She was educated by herself in her own way. My mother really was great.

Oh, when I think of it, how she did it on her own. Me, I had help. I went to school. I had teachers. I had friends who spoke English. My mother, she was fabulous. She was fabulous.

HEID: Plus you said she had two more children when she came to America.

JONAS: Yes, yes. My sister . . .

HEID: What is her name?

JONAS: Lillian. And she's ten years, nine, ten years younger than my brother is fifteen years younger.

HEID: And his name is?

JONAS: Howard, Howard.

HEID: And he was named after somebody?

JONAS: Named after my mother's father, maternal father, yes. We all had names after someone who was deceased.

HEID: So, now besides going to school, did your mother stay home and take care of the house?

JONAS: Oh, yes. My mother never worked outside the house,

no. There was no time. There was no need, either. The livelihood in those years were all about the same, so we rented an apartment. We saved the money, and my father bought this two-story building, ground floor, first and second floor, yes. And it had three apartments. But after Papa died my brother converted it. There were six rooms. We had two three-room apartments on each floor, and the five that was downstairs was converted to a two-room and a three-room. And then when, after Lou got married he left. Lilly was home, and Howard. And my mother had a three-room apartment. She stayed there until quite a long time, until the neighborhood changed so bad she was afraid to stay alone. And I was living at that time in Springfield, Massachusetts. Mama would call me quite often, and I was constantly going back and forth and I finally said to my mother, "Sell the apartment house and get an apartment for yourself." So she went to live with my sister. At that time she had two young children so Mama stayed with them, and she practically raised them.

HEID: But looking back at it, your father's quite an American success story.

JONAS: Yes, yes.

HEID: I mean, by working hard he was able to buy a building.

JONAS: Right, right. Well, you know, people do that. As soon as they have a little money, they like to buy property. Land is important to them because this is the way they lived in the old country. It was always on a piece of land. They never knew what an apartment building was like. So it was part of their, that they brought their own feeling to this country, and by going into business for himself was also a part of their way of life. They always worked for themselves. They trained another one. But, you see, my two brothers did not go into shoe repairing, no. Both brothers went into, were electricians. So it was different. But my God, when my father had the store, my brother Lou would shine the shoes and help him, and I used to go into the store and I used to clean up, separate the leather so that the bigger pieces were re-used and the smaller pieces were thrown out, and I did that every week and then walk home with my father. I was very close to him. I loved him dearly. Too bad he died very young, before any grandchildren. He would have been a great, great, great-grandfather. Oh, he would have been so wonderful to the children. (she is moved)

HEID: It sounds like it.

JONAS: He loved children.

HEID: Well, looking back at it now, what about your life? How did your life turn out?

JONAS: My life turned out to be very well. I married when I was twenty. He was a medical student. We did it the hard way, fifty-odd years ago. He went into the service. I followed him. He went overseas, I came home. He did his training, went out into private practice. We had a nice home. (she is moved) He, too, died very young. We never had any children.
(she pauses)

HEID: But overall . . .

JONAS: But I enjoy my life. I do. I do things that I like. I have certain talents that kept me going. In my own way I think I did very well. It could have been worse. In many ways it couldn't have been better. I have the love and respect of nieces, nephews. In fact, two of my nephews are married. So, you see, they are grown. They respect me, they love me, and I love them in return.

HEID: It sounds like you have a lot to be thankful for.

JONAS: So the circle in a way is really full. It's really great. I've enjoyed talking to you. You're a wonderful listener.

HEID: Thank you.

JONAS: You're patient.

HEID: I guess one last question I would like to ask you. Looking back at everything that you've been through, your family has been through. Has there ever been any regrets of coming to America?

JONAS: Oh, how could it possibly use that word? No! I would have been incinerated if I had stayed in the old country. Oh, no, no. United States opened up the doors for me. Oh, everything was good. I just explained it to you. I had a good marriage, I had a beautiful home. I have the respect of children. My sister's, my brother's children. I would have had nothing of that. No. Then again, I have an additional sister and brother. All that happened after 1921.

HEID: You were very fortunate.

JONAS: Very fortunate, definitely.

HEID: Well, before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like to add that maybe I forgot to ask or . . .

JONAS: I think we covered most of the things that are, maybe somebody would find interesting. I'm doing this really for the next generation. These young children who are growing up, I have totally twelve great-nieces and nephews, you know, counting them all. I'm sure that they will come to Ellis Island, see our

name on the wall, the second wall, and know what I have done today. They'll feel very proud. They'll know that they had a good background, especially their great-grandparents, both my mother and father.

HEID: They have very much to be proud of.

JONAS: They'll have some of their traits. I'm sure of it. I'm a great believer in that.

HEID: Well, then, before we conclude I'd like to take this time to thank you very much.

JONAS: You're quite welcome.

HEID: For sharing your memories with me. It's very, very important.

JONAS: You're quite welcome.

HEID: This is Debra Heid for the National Park Service signing off with Sylvia Jonas at the Ellis Island Recording Studio. Today was April 24th, 1992.