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JULIA (GEULAH) PERSOFF SCHATZBERG

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Julia Schatzberg, who was born Geulah Persoff and came to the United States from Palestine at the age of twelve years old in 1929. Today is May 26, 1992, and I'm very happy to be here today and to be able to talk with you about what you remember about your journey to the United States. Let me start by asking you your birth date.

SCHATZBERG: I was born on May 5th, 1917.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

SCHATZBERG: In Jerusalem.

LEVINE: And did you live in Jerusalem the whole time before you left for the

United States?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, I did, yes. Always in Jerusalem. I never left, well, I left Jerusalem once to go on a trip with school. We went to Tel Aviv. But that was the only time until we went to Tel Aviv to board the ship in Jaffa, which is right near Tel Aviv.

LEVINE: Okay. And what do you remember, do you remember the house you lived in?

SCHATZBERG: I do. My earliest memory is of a house which was next to a huge field and you could see nothing on the horizon. It was that big a field. I think it was a wheat field. Our house was the last house on the street and it was right next to the field. And I remember playing in that field, and I remember all the flowers that grew there. They were cyclamens that grew among the rocks, and when the poppies were in bloom it was a big, red field just full of poppies with other flowers interspersed. That's my most vivid earliest memory is of playing in that field.

LEVINE: And who, what were the family members? Who were the family members that composed your family in Jerusalem?

SCHATZBERG: I had two older brothers, an older sister, and a younger brother. We were five.

LEVINE: And your father left for the United States before the rest of the family, is that right?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, he did, about five, six years before we joined him he came here.

LEVINE: Do you remember him from before you came to the United States?

SCHATZBERG: No, I didn't. I did not. I was, I must have been four or five then, and I didn't remember him.

LEVINE: Well, what was life like in Jerusalem with your mother and your sisters and brothers?

SCHATZBERG: Well, I remember having a wonderful time. We had a lot of fun together. We were always laughing and there was a lot of music and laughter in the house. On looking back I realized that my mother had a very difficult time. She had five children to bring up alone. There was no indoor plumbing. There was no electricity. So I can just imagine what it was like, and I was a twin. I had a twin brother who died at about a year-and-a-half. And she had another child after me, so it must have been very difficult for her. Of course that was while my father was still there, but after he left she still, he wasn't making, it was during the Depression here. He wasn't making much money. He wasn't able to support us. So she had to earn money.

LEVINE: How did she do that?

SCHATZBERG: She took in boarders. For a while she was preparing food and we would take it to the people she prepared meals for. It was a meals on wheels. We were the wheels. (they laugh) Then she opened a restaurant with an aunt and ran that for a while. But times were very hard for her, but I wasn't really aware of it at the time. There

was always food for me, and I was forever playing and having a good time.

LEVINE: Would you say, compared with other people in your community, that you were sort of as well off as most or not?

SCHATZBERG: I suppose there were some who were better off, because I know we were living in a house which was owned by the family of a classmate of mine, so they were certainly wealthier than we were. But I was never aware that there was that much of a difference, I think. I realized that we were not wealthy, but I think everyone was poor, everyone had a hard life because it's fairly primitive.

LEVINE: Were the living quarters large or small? Do you remember them?

SCHATZBERG: We always lived in a house. It was very often a two-story building. They were not enormous. I think they were maybe two bedrooms at most, but the rooms were large. I think many times we slept on the floor. I don't think there were ever enough beds for all of us, but we were accustomed to it, and that's what it was like, so I never felt deprived in that way.

LEVINE: And were you closest to any particular family member growing up in Jerusalem?

SCHATZBERG: I guess to my younger brother rather than my sister. My sister was about two years older, my brother was about two years younger, and I guess I was closer to my younger brother.

LEVINE: And what were their names, your sisters and brothers, and your mother and father, actually.

SCHATZBERG: Well, my mother was Puah. By the way, she was born in Palestine as well. My father was Schmuel, which was Samuel here. She remained Puah. Puah was her name here, too. My oldest brother was Boaz, after him was Abraham, Abraham. Then Tamar, my sister was Tamar. I was Geulah, and my younger brother was Nehemiah. And Nehemiah Persoff is probably a name that might be familiar to some people because he's an actor under that name. He uses that name.

LEVINE: And you mentioned that the meaning of your first name. Do you want to say what that is?

SCHATZBERG: I was called Geulah, which means redemption in Hebrew. And I was named that because it was towards the end of World War II. I'm not sure whether it was after it ended in Palestine, or . . .

LEVINE: World War I.

SCHATZBERG: World War I. Did I say two? World War I. (they laugh) And the British were the victors, and it had been under Turkish rule up to that point. In fact, during the war my father was in the Turkish army, and he had been stationed in Damascus. He was teaching. He was not a soldier. He was teaching. He taught art, because he was an artist. He had studied art in Betsalel, the art school which was established in Jerusalem not long before he was there. It was about ninety years ago it was established.

LEVINE: So did he work as an artist before he was in the army?

SCHATZBERG: He worked as more of a craftsman. He was a jeweler. Here he worked as a jeweler. He made jewelry. But before that he had done a lot of metal work. He made plates and metal pots with pictures on them, designs, decorations and designs. That was, and he also taught in Betsalel. He taught filigree work, which is twisted silver wire work which is still very common. In Israel they make a lot of jewelry that way.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your father ever said about being in the Turkish army?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, he remembers waking up in a dungeon or having malaria. He was very ill. And the effects of that were with him all his life because whenever he had a fever it was severe and he would have tremors with the fever. He was subject to bronchitis for most of his life.

LEVINE: Do you remember his attitude about serving in the Turkish army?

SCHATZBERG: I don't. He just seemed to feel that because he was a citizen and there was a draft, and he was drafted, even though he was, he had five children at the time.

LEVINE: And he was an artist in the . . .

SCHATZBERG: He taught art.

LEVINE: He taught art. To soldiers?

SCHATZBERG: To soldiers, or possibly civilians, yeah.

LEVINE: So why did your father then decide to come to the United States?

SCHATZBERG: I never got it clear from him, but I assume it was for economic reasons. It was difficult to earn enough to support a large family, and he thought he'd do better here. Of course, he came here at a bad time and he didn't really do much better. It was, we came in 1929 but things were already difficult when he came in the earlier twenties.

LEVINE: Now, your two older brothers came before you, your mother and your younger brother, and your older sister.

SCHATZBERG: Right. Yeah, I came with my older sister and younger brother. My two oldest brothers came about a year before we did. It was just a matter of getting all the money together. So when there was enough for them they came.

LEVINE: Do you remember financially how, was it that your mother was able to earn enough to afford that?

SCHATZBERG: No. She had a brother who lived in New York and he helped, he sent some money, and she also took a loan. Because I remember when we came here she had a book that was a Morris Plan, I think. And she was paying it out. She was keeping a record of how much she still owed. So she was paying back the loan which

we had to take to make the journey.

LEVINE: Do you have any recollection of what it cost?

SCHATZBERG: No, I don't, I don't. But we didn't travel in style. It was probably a merchant ship, not really a liner, a passenger liner, because we made so many stops to load and unload.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SCHATZBERG: Although there was a first class and steerage, I guess. Where we were was steerage, but there was first class on the boat.

LEVINE: And so they had cabins, and you were in the hold.

SCHATZBERG: Yeah, they had cabins, right. We were in the hold.

LEVINE: And you remembered the name of the ship as the Aliza?

SCHATZBERG: Yes. It was a French liner. I think it was its last voyage. I think I remember hearing that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, do you remember how you felt about it once the decision was made that you would actually be sailing for America?

SCHATZBERG: I was very excited about it. I had no idea of distances. I used to try to imagine how far away it was because I was told it was far, far away, and it was difficult to imagine because I, the longest distance I had gone was to Tel Aviv up to that point.

So it was hard to imagine. I was excited about it.

LEVINE: Do you remember at all anything that you knew about America, or any stories you'd heard?

SCHATZBERG: Oh, just the stories that we didn't believe, actually. The streets were paved with gold. We did hear that. But I really didn't know much more. I certainly knew nothing of its size or the size of New York City. I had no idea. I didn't know what to expect.

LEVINE: And did you take anything with you that you remember?

SCHATZBERG: You know, I don't remember having luggage at all when we got off at Ellis Island, but we must have had. We just had the clothes on our backs, nothing else. My mother did not take any household things. We didn't have very much. We had very little. What was left behind must have been left for the family that remained. I had an aunt who was still in Palestine, never came here, remained there, and another uncle, actually an uncle, aunt and cousin, my father's brother. My father's sister and my father's brother remained behind.

LEVINE: And how about grandparents? Did you have any grandparents?

SCHATZBERG: We had a, my mother's mother. She lived with us, and she didn't want to come with us.

LEVINE: Was that difficult leaving her?

SCHATZBERG: It was very difficult for my mother and for us, yes. And for her, especially. But she would not come.

LEVINE: Do you remember why she . . .

SCHATZBERG: Well, she was a religious woman, she was orthodox, and felt that she was near death and wanted to die in Israel. That was the reason.

LEVINE: And do you remember how you observed religion before you left Israel, Palestine?

SCHATZBERG: We observed the holidays, but my parents were not religious. We never went to synagogue. We spoke Hebrew, but the holidays were celebrated, all of them. We always got together. For Passover we all got new clothes. And everyone, when you went in the street during a holiday in Jerusalem, you knew it was a holiday because it was universally celebrated. And all the children came out with their new clothes, and there was a festive air. No one worked. The holiday spirit was tremendous, and there were many holidays. Some were more secular than religious, like the seasonal holidays. And for our family they were, they were not religious. They were tradition.

LEVINE: Are there any other memories, when you think back to Palestine, are there any other memories that recur to you from that period of time?

SCHATZBERG: Well, I remember my school and my teachers and I was a member of the scouts. It was not girl scouts, it was scouts, because there were boys in the troop.

And I remember trips we took. We took many trips, hikes. We went hiking a great deal with school as well as the scouts. I remember a camping trip with the scouts where we went into the woods and pitched tents. The first night was spent killing snakes with ammonia because there were many snakes in the area where we pitched the tents, and I remember someone contrived a shower, it was a tin can and there was a stream and it was clear water that we could drink as well as bathe in, shower in. And it was, we slept out for it must have been a one week trip. It was a long camping trip. I remember that very well. I remember having whooping cough, and I think my brother had whooping cough at the same time. And my mother took the two of us. I remember being wrapped up in a scarf around my neck and being taken to visit either a friend who lived in the "country," in quotes, because Jerusalem was pretty much country then, too, but this was further. The air was supposed to be better there. I have a clear memory of that. I have a memory of my sister having her tonsils out and getting a lot of ice cream, which I didn't get, and I remember being angry about that. (she laughs) I remember my grandmother expecting grandchildren who lived in Egypt and they expected, they were coming to visit us, and so she brought chocolate to have for the visiting grandchildren. And for some reason they didn't come, and we thought we'd get the chocolate, but we didn't. It went into a trunk to await their next visit. Because sweets were hard to come by. A banana was a treat. But other than that I remember enjoying food very much, and I remember the most delicious fruits. We used to eat them, climb trees and eat apricots and some other fruit which I have never seen here which was delicious. I don't remember what it was. We had a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables and salads.

LEVINE: And, of course, your mother must have been a good cook if she was

doing that for . . .

SCHATZBERG: Oh, she was an excellent cook. And she knew quite a bit about nutrition. We were, we ate healthfully. We had thina, in those days. And we had it, she mixed it with molasses, and we used it as a bread spread. Very often that was breakfast, or sometimes even lunch. And we had humus which, I mean, that's something new here, but that's mideastern food, which we had. She also prepared many Sephardic-style dishes because many of our neighbors were Sephardic. That's from the oriental country, the eastern countries. She was a good cook. But she also knew, well, we used to get cod liver oil. That was not a pleasure. She'd go around with a teaspoon and a bottle of cod liver oil. Each one of us would get some, a teaspoon of cod liver oil, and she had wedges of orange to give because the taste was so horrible. She knew about that. And she had, we had trachoma very often because it was highly contagious. As soon as it cleared up we would catch it again. And she had to go around and open our eyes every morning. Of course, first she had to open hers because there was stuff oozing out of the eyes all the time, and your eyes would be pasted together. So she would go around with cotton, cotton batting, absorbent cotton, and boric acid, and wash our eyes so we could open them in the morning because they were pasted together.

LEVINE: Now, did everyone in the family have it at one time or another?

SCHATZBERG: Yes. I don't remember my father having it, but he must have had it. I just wasn't aware of it.

LEVINE: And was it the kind of, it was the kind of thing that recurred?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, because it was so contagious and everyone around you had it constantly.

LEVINE: And how was it transmitted, do you know? How . . .

SCHATZBERG: I suppose by towels, yeah. Or hands, I mean, if you touched your eyes and touched someone else's hand and they touched their eyes they would get it.

LEVINE: And what did it feel like when you had it?

SCHATZBERG: Other than the fact that your eyes were sealed all the time, I don't remember that the eyes, it was not painful, it was not itchy. I don't remember ever being uncomfortable with it, but I understand that it could cause a lot of, many problems if it wasn't checked. It could lead to blindness, yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's see. So when you left do you remember the journey? Do you remember leaving your house, leaving the town?

SCHATZBERG: I remember my last day in school and saying goodbye. There was a party, and I was given a gift, a wooden squatting camel with my friends' signatures on the bottom. It was an inkwell, actually. There was an inkwell in the camel's hump. And I had a book of matches because the scouts had a party also, and it was a campfire, and a book of matches lit the campfire. That was a souvenir I had, so that was saying goodbye to friends from the scouts. I remember being photographed. We still have

photographs, the photograph for the passport of the family together. But also with my grandmother there were photographs for her to keep of all of us before my brothers left, as well. I remember very vividly coming to Tel Aviv and staying with another uncle, my father's, another brother that my father had who had a hotel in Tel Aviv, and it was right near the beach. And I remember playing on the beach with my brother and being excited, there were a bunch of dead fish on the beach, and we brought them to my aunt thinking she could use them, and she chased us away. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So did you stay very long before you boarded the ship?

SCHATZBERG: It was just a few days, but at the last minute my mother was not allowed because her trachoma was active. She was not allowed to come with us. So she got hold of everyone who boarded the ship and asked them to take care of us on board the ship, and they did. It must have been very difficult for her. I don't remember being afraid to go without her, but I know it was hard for her to let us go alone. Because my sister was about fourteen or fifteen and she was . . .

LEVINE: The oldest.

SCHATZBERG: Of my brother and I she was the oldest.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, then, when you were aboard ship were there other people watching out for you that you recall?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, many people. They were wonderful. They were very caring. I remember I latched on to some gentleman and wouldn't let go of him. It must have

been hard for him because he was a young man and there were young women on board the ship, and I hampered his style, I'm sure. (they laugh) I clung to him. So I guess I was more fearful than I realized.

LEVINE: And, I'm sorry, what was the voyage like?

SCHATZBERG: It was exciting because we stopped at so many wonderful places. We stopped in Constantinople and Algiers and Madeira. We went through Straits of Gibraltar and through the Dardanelles. It was a long, long journey. It was fascinating, it was interesting, it was fun. We got off the ship only in Algiers and for just a short time. I remember walking through the city in an arcade, which was something new for me, with shops along the way. And it was during Passover. There was a seder on board the ship. We were asked whether we wanted to eat kosher or non-kosher food and we said non-kosher because we were not kosher at home, but we had never had ham or pork. And whenever we sat down at the table the kosher table would go "oink, oink" at our table. So we, when there was meat we were not accustomed to it and we didn't eat it, so we ate mostly hard boiled eggs it seems to me I remember.

LEVINE: Okay. Why don't we stop here while we turn the tape over and then we'll resume.

SCHATZBERG: Sure, okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: So, resuming now on Side B, it must have been an eye-opening experience to see all these very different kinds of places, although you really just got off the ship in Algiers.

SCHATZBERG: In one place, and all we saw when the ship stopped was, you know, the port. Except in Constantinople I remember I was very impressed by divers who went diving for coins that people threw into the water. They were youngsters who were diving for coins. That made a big impression. And in Madeira I remember that someone bought a banana tree, a whole, you know, big . . .

LEVINE: A hand? Is that what you call a hand of bananas? Or a whole tree?

SCHATZBERG: Uh, it's a whole, it's not the whole tree, but it was a very big branch with many, maybe, many bunches of bananas attached to it. And they bought it to everyone on the ship, so we had lots of bananas. That was in Madeira, the merchants, the banana merchants came right up to the ship and people bought bananas from them. They must have been very inexpensive. That was one of the vivid memories, and it was a storm one day and everyone was seasick. We felt terrible but we never threw up. We were the only ones who didn't throw up. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And you were, what were the accommodations like in the steerage?

SCHATZBERG: I don't remember. They were certainly not posh. I know, I think we slept on mats on the floor. I don't remember beds. But, you know, it wasn't important to us. We weren't accustomed to much luxury, so I didn't feel that I was deprived. I didn't know any better.

LEVINE: So then do you remember coming into New York, into New York Harbor?

SCHATZBERG: Yes, yes, I do. I remember getting off the ship and coming into Ellis Island. And one, with my brother, because my sister was taken from us and put into quarantine in the hospital here on Ellis Island before we came into the big hall. So that by the time we came to a desk where there was a man sitting and I guess taking information, she was no longer with us. So we came into this huge room, just my brother and I. And I remember wondering how my father will ever find us in this, which I realized was a big city, and in this place where there were so many people, how would we ever get together. I was concerned about that.

LEVINE: And then, of course, you must have been the responsible one, or you were the older one anyway. Your younger brother and you were . . .

SCHATZBERG: Yes, but as a matter of fact by the time our father finally did come I didn't recognize him but my brother did. He said, "That's Abba." I said, "No, it's not. Abba is a big, tall man." And this was, you know, a short man. He was wearing a straw hat which was flat on top, which made him even look shorter, look even shorter. And he recognized my father, and he was at least two years younger than I. (she laughs) So we were equally, we shared the responsibility. We looked after each other.

LEVINE: And do you remember what you thought about your father when you first were re-united?

SCHATZBERG: Uh, no, I don't. Well, he recognized me because I had a broken tooth. Because we changed certainly more than he did. My brother had been, what, maybe a three or four-year-old, and here he was a ten-year-old. So he wouldn't really have recognized us, and I don't think he had gotten any photos of us. But he knew that I had fallen and broken a front tooth, and here I was with a half tooth in front, so he knew it was I.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

SCHATZBERG: And I remember being taken outdoors to play, in while we were here. We slept here. I don't remember how many nights. And I think it was a double-decker bed, I remember a double-decker bed, the first time I've ever seen one. And I remember being taken outdoors to play. And we had games and toys we were given. We were not, the only toys we had at home, back home, were toys my father had made. He had made us wooden toys, you know. And so that was, that impressed us. We knew exactly what toys they were. And I was very impressed with how white the bread was here. I guess we were given Wonder Bread. I thought it was just incredible. (she laughs) That bread could be so white. And, uh, that's it. I have no idea how long we were here or why we were here, why we slept here.

LEVINE: What happened to your sister?

SCHATZBERG: Uh, she stayed. After we left she wasn't released yet. I guess she had to clear her trachoma, to cure it before she was released. So she came a few days after we left. My father picked us, my brother and I, up and took us to my uncle in

Brooklyn, and then he came back and got my sister some days later.

LEVINE: Was there a fear that your sister would be sent back?

SCHATZBERG: I, it never occurred to me that she might be, but I suppose it's possible if they couldn't clear her trachoma they may have sent her back. But possibly because of the circumstances that we were let go, they may not have considered that.

LEVINE: Well, it doesn't sound as though you had the idea that Ellis Island was a place to be fearful of as far as the inspection and that you might be returned or . . .

SCHATZBERG: No, I didn't know enough to be afraid, I guess. I guess anything could have happened, but I didn't know enough to be afraid. I wasn't fearful, I was interested. Everything was new. My only fear was that I might not ever be able to get together with my father, that he wouldn't find us and we wouldn't find him.

LEVINE: So then what was, and what was the food like here? Do you remember that at all?

SCHATZBERG: Just being impressed with the white bread. And I think if we had cream cheese that was another white thing that impressed me, because everything that we had was more natural, you know. It wasn't processed so. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And did you meet all kinds of different people? Were there lots of people being processed when you were here?

SCHATZBERG: There were. I don't remember interacting with anyone. I think my

brother and I sort of stuck together. I don't remember. There was a young woman who I made friends with on board the ship. Her name was also Geulah. But I don't think, she wasn't in Ellis Island. There was no one else who had been on board the ship with us, who was detained here. So we really didn't know anyone, and didn't get to meet anyone that I can remember while we were here.

LEVINE: And then when your father took you off of Ellis Island, can you describe that?

SCHATZBERG: Yes. I remember being impressed. I guess we went by subway to Brooklyn and I remember being impressed by the subway. And he took us to my aunt and uncle and there were four cousins, one of them my age, the others younger. And we stayed with them. I remember sleeping in this bed with all three of them, I think. It was just a one-, possibly a two-bedroom apartment with a bathtub in the kitchen. And we didn't stay there very long because my father found an empty apartment and I guess, but it must have been at least a week because he had to furnish the apartment. It was a cold water flat, no steam heat, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, near where my uncle lived, the one we stayed with.

LEVINE: And was your father working at that time?

SCHATZBERG: He was. He was working as a jeweler, yes.

LEVINE: And were your older brothers then re-united with you and . . .

SCHATZBERG: They were, they were not here when we came. I don't remember, one

brother I think was in, was working on a farm in Farmingdale, Long Island. And the other one must have been also working somewhere out of New York City. But when we got our own apartment I remember that they came back and we were all living together.

LEVINE: And how long was it before your sister came?

SCHATZBERG: It was very shortly.

LEVINE: And your mother?

SCHATZBERG: Probably a week or two, though. My mother came some months later, several months later.

LEVINE: And was it odd for you to be around your father, whom you really hadn't known very well.

SCHATZBERG: It was, yes, it was odd. It was odd. I was an odd child because I spoke very little. One of my older brothers, Abe, and I had very few words. We were very quiet, very silent. We only really spoke when we were, as children together. But when there were adults around there was never a peep out of us. So I wasn't very talkative.

LEVINE: Was it shyness, do you think?

SCHATZBERG: It was definitely shyness, yes, it was.

LEVINE: And what was your father like?

SCHATZBERG: Uh, he was a, hmm. How to describe my father. He was a very handsome man and rather vain, dressed very well, sort of a ladies man. And didn't know very much about children because he had been away for so long without us. My cousin, who is my age, another cousin, was very fond of him and had formed a very close relationship with him before we came. She was a sort of surrogate child to him and she was much closer to him than I was. And she and I were very close.

LEVINE: And when your mother came, then, after some months, what was it like for them to be together again, your mother and father?

SCHATZBERG: Oh, it, I wasn't too tuned into it, but I'm sure it must have been very difficult. It must have been very hard to be together again after all that time, and never having much privacy. I mean, there were, we were seven people in this small apartment. There were just two bedrooms, so some of us slept in the living room and I guess my sister and I slept in the living room and my brother, three brothers in the bedroom. But the rooms were very close together. There was really no privacy for them, so it must have been very, very difficult. And, you know, Williamsburg was not a pretty place to come to after Jerusalem, which was a beautiful city and it was sort of country-like and it was quiet and the air was clear and fresh and it was quiet. This was a very noisy slum. We lived in a tenement building. So that transition was difficult for me. I was very angry at being uprooted, really, actually. That's where my . . .

LEVINE: So you were a little disappointed in what you found here.

SCHATZBERG: Yes, I was. And the adjustment was a difficult one for me. I had to

learn a new language. I was put into a grade with young children until I learned the language. After that, you know, once I learned English I was, I arrived at my right grade for my age level. But I remember being angry at being uprooted. I didn't know the reason for it, so, uh, I was.

LEVINE: Well, was school difficult? Were you treated, because you were an immigrant, differently, or were there lots of other children who had just come and didn't speak English?

SCHATZBERG: No, there weren't, because in 1929 there wasn't much, it was not one of the times when many immigrants came and we were the only ones who these people ever met who spoke Hebrew, who came from that part of the world, they were accustomed to Eastern European immigrants. We were well-treated, but it was uncomfortable being with little children, you know. I was as tall as the teacher. (she laughs) And until I learned the language it was a big uncomfortable and I was so far ahead of the children in everything but the language so that. But it didn't take very long. I think we were sort of promoted every day until we reached the right grade level. But the strange thing that happened was that my, Nehemiah was put into a higher grade than I because somehow they thought Nehemiah was a girl's name. I was given the name Julia. They thought maybe that was a boy's name, or Julius or something. But that got straightened out. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you recall either learning to speak or learning to read any particular experiences?

SCHATZBERG: I do. I remember being called upon to read aloud in class, and I was able to read rather quickly, but when I came to the word C-O-L-O-N-E-L I said, "Col-onel." Which is, everyone laughed, but that's how it was written, and that's how I said it. (she laughs) But I didn't seem to have real difficulty in learning the language. I picked it up very quickly. I made friends. Well, I had my cousins, and I had made friends right away, and was out in the street playing very quickly.

LEVINE: And was the play similar? Were there any striking differences?

SCHATZBERG: This, many of the games were the same, or different songs to bounce ball to. But we used to bounce ball and play jacks. We played jacks with actual bones in Palestine, but here they were the metal jacks and the small ball. And there were some games that were different. We used to bounce a ball off the steps, sort of handball, which we didn't do that. But we skipped rope. And did we play hide-and-go-seek? I suppose we did.

LEVINE: And then did your mother work when she came here?

SCHATZBERG: No, but she did some, she took some homework. I remember that she used to pick up some bags, big bags, with powder puffs. And she would stitch the band into the powder puff. She did, that was homework. She did that. She had her hands full feeding this big family on a coal-burning stove in that first apartment.

LEVINE: Do you recall whether she was happy to have come here, or was she disappointed, too?

SCHATZBERG: I think, she was such a happy, naturally happy, contented woman. She always thought she was the most fortunate of women, even though on looking back she had the most difficult life I could imagine. She was always singing, always cheerful. And she was certainly very happy to be reunited with my father. They were very much in love with each other. She was happy to be reunited and to have all her children with her. That was all she really needed. She felt just fortunate in having these wonderful children, as she put it. (she laughs)

LEVINE: And was there anything else about adjusting to this country that you remember?

SCHATZBERG: Well, I remember being lost, my father lost me in the subway the week we arrived, I think. He was taking us to the Bronx, or coming back from the Bronx, my brother and I. That was before my sister came and before my mother came. And we were at some busy station. It may have been Grand Central, 42nd Street, and the train came and there was a big crowd, and everyone pushed into the train. My father just went in and my brother followed him and I couldn't get in because people pushed me aside. And I stayed on the platform and the door closed, and there I was on the platform alone, and that was a frightening experience. And I had no idea that train could, that he could come back and get me. I didn't know what to do. I just wandered off. I walked and walked. And I suppose I started to cry because people, some people gave me a coin, which I wouldn't know what to do with, but someone finally took me to a token booth, what's now a token booth. And they found someone who spoke Hebrew. And I was able, I remembered the street, not the number, of where my uncle's house

was, because I was staying with them at the time. And this gentleman took me to a candy store, I guess he owned a candy store, and gave me an ice cream sundae to eat and then took me by car, my first automobile ride, I think, to Cooke Street, and he said, "You point out the house when you see it." And when we got near the house all the neighbors were out in the street looking for me. The police had been called and the neighbors were out looking for me. So that had a happy ending, but that was frightening, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you stayed in school, and how far did you go in school?

SCHATZBERG: I went through high school, yeah. I was not crazy about school. I didn't mind school. I enjoyed learning certain subjects, especially English literature. I enjoyed that. I was not a good student. I was not a student. I didn't know how to study. But everything I heard I absorbed so that I was a fairly decent student. So I was ready to leave school before I graduated from high school, but my mother persuaded me to stay. And I was lucky because my sister had to go to work. She could not go. She went to school at night. She did high school at night.

LEVINE: And did your mother and father . . .

SCHATZBERG: And worked.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father become citizens?

SCHATZBERG: My father was a citizen when we came. We became citizens on his paper. And my mother became a citizen on her own. She went, they both went to night

school to learn English. My mother knew some English. She had gone to school in Palestine. She knew French, she had studied French, and she knew some English, but she went to school here to improve her English, and she both read, and they both read and spoke English well.

LEVINE: And were they, was your mother and father's attitude for you to become Americanized, or were they more inclined to maintain some of the ways of . . .

SCHATZBERG: They were anxious to maintain the language, because we spoke Hebrew at home. And we kept our, we celebrated the holidays the same way we did back home. They were certain American things that they weren't crazy about.

LEVINE: Like can you remember what?

SCHATZBERG: Well, they'd prefer that we didn't listen to the popular music but to classical music. My father was something of an intellectual. He was very well-read. He knew Russian and read in Russian, and he knew Hebrew and Yiddish. He also read English. He knew the great literature of the world. He was, I suppose, something of a snob as well. And he, the popular culture here didn't appeal to him. They never forbade us to do anything, but we got the feeling that some things are better to do than others, that they'd prefer us to do some things better. But they were not very terribly strict.

LEVINE: And then when did you meet your husband?

SCHATZBERG: I met my husband, well, we left Williamsburg in 1935 and moved to the

Bronx, and I was in third year of high school so that I graduated from high school in the Bronx, Morris High School. And then I went to work in a factory even though I hadn't had a commercial course in high school I learned stenography and typing, but it was very difficult to get a job, and my sister had this job and was leaving because she had gotten married, and so I was able to get her job, and I went right to work in a factory, a corset and brassiere factory, and I was sewing hooks and eyes on brassieres, and I did that for about six years. So then I met my husband in 1939 through, a friend that I worked with and a friend that he worked with were married. They got us together, and we were married in, I guess we met in 1938. We married in 1939. And we got an apartment not far from my mother. My family lived a few blocks away and his family lived across the street. And then he was drafted in 19, uh, '42, I think, and was stationed in Long Island. He went into the medical corps, was stationed in Long Island at Mason General Hospital, which was part of Pilgrim State. It was for, it was a mental hospital. He was stationed there, and I got a job there. I worked there. And then I became pregnant with our first child and he was, he went overseas six months later. But he got to, he was stationed outside of Paris. He didn't mind that a bit. He got to know Paris very well. He arrived the week the war was over in Europe. But he was there for about a year. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: We have just a few more minutes, but first was your husband born in this country?

SCHATZBERG: He was, yes. He was born here.

LEVINE: And would you name your, did you have more than one child?

SCHATZBERG: I have two children.

LEVINE: Would you give their names?

SCHATZBERG: First a daughter who was born 1945 that's Irene. And Laura was born in 1948.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHATZBERG: Laura, and Laura went to Israel when she was about nineteen, and lived there for about ten, ten, eleven years. And she was in the army there, and went to Hebrew University, and graduated from Hebrew University. She is now back in this country, lives in California. They both do. They live in California.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to end with regarding the fact that you were born in Palestine and came here as a, early in your teenage years, and spent the rest of your life here.

SCHATZBERG: Well, sometimes I feel as if I had never been anywhere else. I forget that I wasn't born here until someone asks me where I was born. Someone says, "Were you born here?" I say, "As a matter of fact, I wasn't." And they're always surprised. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I've been speaking with Julia Schatzberg, and I'm here at the Ellis Island Studio on May 26, 1992 and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.