

EI-193

BERTHA ZEICHNER RENNER

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AUSTRIA (later the Ukraine), 1920

AGE 19

PORT: LE HAVRE

RESIDENCES: UKRAINE: KOLOMEA

US: WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and today is July 19, 1992, and I'm here at the home of Bertha Renner in Franklin Square, New York. Bertha Renner's maiden name was Zeichner, and she came from Austria in 1920 when she was nineteen years of age.

RENNER: Right.

LEVINE: I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to hearing your story, and I'd like to start at the very beginning by you giving me your birth date.

RENNER: I was born June 8th, 1901.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

RENNER: I was born, at that time it was called Austria, but Kolomea. Now it's the Ukraine.

LEVINE: And, can you spell that, Kolomea?

RENNER: Yes. K-O-L-O-M-E-A.

LEVINE: Is Kolomea a small town? Big city?

RENNER: No. It's a fair, very nice fair city.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what kind of a city is it? When you lived there as a little girl, what type of industry, what type of occupation?

RENNER: There were factories that they produced candles and they exported all over. They also refined salt and they exported it. And there were beautiful parks and beautiful monuments and, what else I have in mind. A very lovely city. I see it in my brain.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you live in Kolomea the whole time before you came to America?

RENNER: I lived in Kolomea till 1916, when the war broke out and the Russians occupied the city. And we were told to immigrate because when the Russians come in and girls, they do horrible things. So we made up our minds to leave Kolomea and

to go further, but they had no trains, so we had to walk four weeks by foot, sleep near the waters because on the main roads soldiers marched towards battle. And city by city until we reached a bigger city than Kolomea, Stanislaw.

LEVINE: S-T-A-N-I-S . . .

RENNER: L-O-W.

LEVINE: Now, why don't we start, then, by dealing with that period of years before you left Kolomea, and then we'll go further after. What do you remember? Do you remember the house you lived in? Tell me, if you can, what it looks like, what sounds you heard. Anything that you felt . . .

RENNER: We heard cannons exploding, you know, in Kolomea, by the Russians.

LEVINE: Earlier, before that time, before the war came, what kind of a place was it before that?

RENNER: It was a very beautiful place, and we had a very lovely family, and I was very happy. And we felt very bad to leave it, but we had to.

LEVINE: Now, tell me about your family. What was your mother's name?

RENNER: Judith -- Edith.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name?

RENNER: Zamkomig.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

RENNER: Yes. Z-A-M-K-O with the (indicates umlaut) M-I-G.

LEVINE: And how about your father? What was his name?

RENNER: Abraham.

LEVINE: Abraham. And brothers and sisters?

RENNER: One brother and three sisters.

LEVINE: And their names?

RENNER: Henry Zeichner, Ethel Zeichner. She was in America. She was the oldest. You see? Ethel Zeichner. My father was in the army. He was drafted when he was fifty years old.

LEVINE: Fifty?

RENNER: Fifty. Not to be in battlefield, but take the place of an active soldier, you know.

LEVINE: Well, why don't we finish by telling me your other two

sisters' names?

RENNER: Well, I said one Ethel, and one Libby, which she is still here, Libby. The brother and the sister died, here.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So you had two sisters?

RENNER: Including me, three, and one brother.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, now, what was the house like that you lived in?

RENNER: It was a lovely house because if you'd like, my mother is standing there, my mother liked everything very beautiful, and she dressed us nice, and she tried to give us some education, and that's about all. We were happy until we left, because we had to.

LEVINE: Well, what did you do? Did you go to school there?

RENNER: I went to school four years, four years, from six to ten.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about school?

RENNER: What I remember, that I loved to learn, and I always raised my hand, but the teacher never called on me because you know somebody else has to answer. But they always told me I'm

smart, my mother, and I'm beautiful and I'm good. I was very praised, and that still stays with me.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, how about your father? What did he do for work?

RENNER: My father was a, what shall I call it. He had a wagon where he bought dishes, earthenware, like a peddler, but with a horse and wagon. He went away for the whole week to make a living, you know, and stopped in different places, and came back for the weekend for Saturday. Saturday we went, all the children, to shul, to temple, and it was very beautiful. In the afternoon we had dinner and we went for walks. (Hebrew) they called it. Are you Jewish?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RENNER: Okay. You know what, but you probably don't. That means for walk, the family, all the family (?), we went near the river, in the woods, you know. That was Saturday entertainment.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have grandparents in your town?

RENNER: I had a grandma, but she died when I maybe was very young. Just I remember my grandmother.

LEVINE: Did you have aunts and uncles and cousins?

RENNER: Oh, yeah, yes. My aunts and uncles were very comfortable, so when they heard a war was going to come, so they ordered a wagon from the railroad and packed their belongings and went away to Vienna because there it was safe, Austria, yes.

LEVINE: Now, was this town, what was the proportion of Jewish people and non-Jewish or Gentile people?

RENNER: This, usually there was, like, a ghetto where some Jews lived very poor, but we didn't. We lived, like, in the middle. We weren't very poor, but we also weren't rich. So I couldn't tell. Of course, Gentiles was more. Poles and Ukraines. But I couldn't say. Of course, Jews less than the others.

LEVINE: The others. But did you live in a neighborhood where there were Gentiles, or was it a Jewish neighborhood?

RENNER: Oh, yes, neighborhood. We had, my mother was a sick woman and we even had a Gentile maid, you know. For there for the food, and we bought her a pair of boots, that's all. We didn't even have to pay.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. Now, your mother was sick. What did your mother have?

RENNER: Gallbladder, diabetes, different things.

LEVINE: What do you remember, can you recount any experiences with your mother when you were in your early life in Kolomea?

RENNER: Of course I can account a lot of things. I, like I said, I was very much loved and praised, and what shall I tell you, I tried to help to clean the house, you know. She was very clean, exceptionally clean. And that's that.

LEVINE: Did your mother, was your mother the person who cooked the meals?

RENNER: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember any kinds of dishes that she made that you really liked?

RENNER: I still, I talk to my family and I tell them all the stories.

LEVINE: Now, tell some of them.

RENNER: Well, red beans, which you have to soak overnight. And in the morning they're ready to cook, and you cook them, and you cook rice, and you mix it out. And you brown onions, a lot of onions, and you put in there chicken wings, pieces of meat, you know. It was delicious. And then you serve it on a plate, and the browned onion on top, like you put on a pizza. It was

delicious, and it's still in my taste. And my daughter, I have another daughter, tells me in Puerto Rico they make the same dish.

LEVINE: Oh, paella.

RENNER: Something.

LEVINE: ( prompted by family members in the room ) I think they call it, yeah. Uh-huh. Can you remember an experience where you exchanged food for money with sisters? With your sister? You don't want to tell it. How about piano lessons? Did you take piano lessons?

RENNER: Loved it. I wanted so much everything. I wanted to play piano. I sing, by the way. I'm a very good singer.

LEVINE: Well, maybe you could sing on this tape at some point.

RENNER: I can sing very nice German songs.

LEVINE: Can you remember any songs from this time in Kolomea?

RENNER: I remember a little bit Polish, but I forgot it because I didn't practice it, a little bit Polish, but German, because then, maybe I'm too much ahead.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's go in order, and then you come to that

part.

RENNER: Okay.

LEVINE: We'll make sure.

RENNER: You remind.

LEVINE: Okay. But how about the piano lessons?

RENNER: I wanted very much to play piano. So I had a friend that was a pianist, a girl, but she probably, either she was killed in the Holocaust or, but she played very beautiful. So she, we didn't have a piano, so she let me into her house. And I didn't think, I was very young, she probably was talented, you know. And I thought, well, she can play, why can't I play? And I, you know, practiced, that's all.

LEVINE: Okay. So now do you want to tell about when you left, when you walked for four weeks.

RENNER: Till we reached, for four weeks we walked to village Stanislaw. Then the government gave transportation into, to take those refugees into Yugoslavia. And there families came to the train and adopted. Of course, they picked us because we were the cleanest, you know. ( she laughs ) I remember, well, a very wealthy family took us. My brother, one sister, no, my

brother was also in the war when he was seventeen.

LEVINE: He was drafted into the army?

RENNER: Yes, into the, into the Ukraine army, because he was in Germany. He went there with family to learn something better than he could in Kolomea.

LEVINE: So he was living in Germany, and he was . . .

RENNER: Drafted there, to take him into the army, and was fighting the Russians.

LEVINE: I see.

RENNER: Seventeen years, yes.

LEVINE: Then did he write to you? Did you hear from him?

RENNER: Well, my poor mother, when the soldiers marched to (?), to fight the Russians, they were already in Kolomea, where we left. She was running in the, to the soldiers, and she said, "I'll take you in. I'll give you a home if somebody will, I'll take you if somebody will take in my soldier, my son, you know." It's sentimental.

LEVINE: So when you got to Yugoslavia, what was this family like that you lived with?

RENNER: This family, we didn't understand, they talk different language, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the family?

RENNER: No. But they had, what do you call, a little house like in the front here. A caboose or something. And their grapes, vines, growing. So she didn't take us to the house, you know. We were, how many people? My sister, my mother and me, three. She let us hold there in that little house. Did you notice here a little?

LEVINE: Like a cabana?

RENNER: Like that little house for shade.

MRS. RENNER'S DAUGHTER: A gazebo.

RENNER: A gazebo. The grapes were growing over it, and they had a farm. We picked string beans in this gazebo, and into bushels, you know. Something to do for us. And then in the evening, even the meals, they didn't take us in the house. They served us outside. Delicious meals, yes.

LEVINE: And so how long were you there?

RENNER: We were there till we contacted our family, my aunts, in Vienna. Because they didn't know where we are, you know.

Somehow we knew they were in Vienna, and they probably told these people, and she got in touch with them, and they took us to Vienna. Yes.

LEVINE: By train you went, then.

RENNER: Yes, of course. No planes for then.

LEVINE: No. So you went to Vienna.

RENNER: Yes.

LEVINE: So you were there a matter of weeks?

RENNER: From '16 to '20, to 1920. From 1916, you know, till 1920.

LEVINE: You were . . .

RENNER: Yes. The war was over in 1918, so we tried to find, to get in touch with my sister in America, and somehow she, we got in touch, and she made, had to make affidavits, you know, and a visa, to be able to bring us to America.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, what can you, what do you remember about those years from 1916 to 1920?

RENNER: Well, we were in Vienna. I worked, I was already a girl, a sixteen-year-old, you know. I worked in a military

factory.

LEVINE: What did you do?

RENNER: Uniforms. They used to give uniforms, and there were machines and foremen and, you know, a whole little factory. And they would give us, like, a bundle like that, and we would finish it on the machine. Not everything, it was part work, one did buttons, one did the machine work. I did the machine. And we got paid. I don't remember how much. We got paid.

LEVINE: How did you feel about working there in that factory?

RENNER: I was glad to be alive, you know, from walking four weeks and burned up houses. On the road was already burned out houses, you know, from Kolomea to Stanislaw. That was paradise.

LEVINE: And you stayed together with your sister and your mother?

RENNER: Right. Till we got the visas and everything, you know, through the ambassador, what you had to do, and we got notice that we can leave Vienna. Otherwise we would have to go back to Kolomea, and that we didn't want, you know. So we waited to get permission, when the day comes, to go to America.

LEVINE: Now, what did your sister do while you were . . .

RENNER: My younger sister.

LEVINE: Which sister was that?

RENNER: Our youngest one.

LEVINE: What is her name?

RENNER: Libby.

LEVINE: Libby.

RENNER: She was a millinery in Kolomea. Hats, you know, there, they bought the raw stuff, they made it from scratch, you know. ( she laughs ) And she was very handy till this day. You know, very handy, and she worked as a millinery. She got better paid than I was by day, by the government, for the military uniforms.

LEVINE: And your mother? Was your mother able to work, or she was sickly at that time?

RENNER: No, she was sick, yes, yes.

LEVINE: So you provided for her.

RENNER: Well, my father was in the army. Maybe she got a little bit from the army. We got along, we saved. When we told my sister, all we need is the schiffscard, the tickets for the

boat, not a penny we have extra money, whatever it takes.

LEVINE: Now, did your father write to you?

RENNER: From the army?

LEVINE: Yeah.

RENNER: No.

LEVINE: You didn't hear anything?

RENNER: No. He was sent home sick because he was watching the trenches, you know, at night, you know. And his feet became swollen. You know, he was discharged.

LEVINE: Oh. So he came into Vienna.

RENNER: No, no, no. That was already in Vienna, yeah. To America, that's right. My father came, too, with us, and they died here, my father and my mother, that's right.

LEVINE: Now, is this where you remember the German songs from, this period of time?

RENNER: In Germany I was very good, of course. I picked up. I knew a little bit from Kolomea. They used to teach German, you know. German, religion, and Polish, a little bit of Ukrainish. Every bit a little bit I knew.

LEVINE: Now, your brother, was he sent to the front?

RENNER: Oh, yes. He was sent to Italy. Italy, on the Italian front, near the Piave River where thousands of soldiers got drowned, but he survived.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RENNER: ( Mrs. Renner's daughter whispers to her ) Nah! I wouldn't tell it. That's silly. Please!

LEVINE: Okay. Now, let's see. Now, you said before that you remembered some songs.

RENNER: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: In German.

RENNER: Yes. My mother used to say I have a nightingale in the house.

LEVINE: Oh.

RENNER: Yes. And believe me they don't feel hungry. They say you sing when you're hungry. I sang when I was hungry because there wasn't enough food. You know, they used to give ration tickets.

LEVINE: What would you eat? What would be a typical day what you would have?

RENNER: Please. My mother got up, as sick as she was, four o'clock in the morning to stay in front of a dairy store because there the government delivered milk and butter, you know, an egg, you know. She would get up early in the morning when it was dark and stay in line, and the line was big, big, big, because, and poor people, luckily, sometimes it was sold out, so you got nothing. But most of the time she came home with a little food, you know. And she was very handy. She made the best of everything like that dish I told you. If she could get it, I mean, exactly. But we weren't hungry any more.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember some of these songs? Could you sing a little bit of that?

RENNER: Of course! While the machine was working in the factory there were Viennese young girls, you know. And you were singing while you were working, yes. So I learned quick, and I know a very beautiful love song.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful.

RENNER: Do you know a little bit German?

LEVINE: Very little. I can't really. But I would love to

hear you sing it.

RENNER: Okay, dear. ( she sings in German ) Thank you for listening.

LEVINE: Thank you! Do you know the name of that song?

RENNER: I forget.

LEVINE: What's the story?

RENNER: The story is about lovers, young lovers that, you know, he's dreaming of her, and even he looks in his eyes, it's all lovers, and I was already in love then.

LEVINE: Oh. With who?

RENNER: My husband.

LEVINE: You met your husband in Vienna?

RENNER: That's right. Look. ( she shows a photograph ) And that's me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, tell me your husband's name.

RENNER: William.

LEVINE: William. And how did you meet him?

RENNER: He came from Kolomea, the same city that I was born, and he was born there, and he, I met him through my brother. You know, my brother was back from the war in Vienna, and they met someplace, and he took him, invited him to his home. We lived there, you know. And there he saw me, we fell in love, and that was just before we would leave Vienna to go to America.

So I promised him when I come there I'll send for him, and I did.

LEVINE: So the song that you sang, when would you have heard that, or when would you have sung that song? Under what circumstances?

RENNER: It felt good. Young and love to sing, other songs too, but the others (?) I didn't, I always cared for something different, better.

LEVINE: Now, did you, like, did you get together with other young people and did you have dancing, or what kinds of things did you do for entertaining?

RENNER: Well, we went to a beach, you know, in a different section in Vienna, you know, to a beach. We went in the woods, you know, picking blueberries, you know. And the movies, you know. It was then maybe five cents a movie. ( she laughs ) Things like dancing, yes. I'm a very, oh . . . ( she gets up )

LEVINE: Be careful, now, with this. ( referring to microphone )

RENNER: That's dancing.

LEVINE: A medal, a trophy.

RENNER: Grossinger's.

LEVINE: Grossinger's, I see. ( she laughs ) Grossinger, Bertha Renner, April 1955. Do you want to tell about that?

RENNER: About that? Well, we were there, it was for Passover we would go away, you know. And they asked who would like to dance, you know. And I raised my hand and my husband, he says, "Go dance." And I went on the stage, and I danced with this, I forgot his name. ( voice off mike ) Yes. And I danced the Blue Danube, a waltz. And very, very beautiful and, of course, applaud. I was then already fifty or something or sixty. And the next day, and I won a bottle of champagne, and the statue. And the next day we would sit and listen to jokes and stories like they did in Grossinger's. Everybody knew what became a personality. See, it was very nice.

LEVINE: Very nice. Were you sorry to be leaving? Now, you had just met your husband, and then you were leaving for

America. Like, was that within weeks, or was it longer?

RENNER: Within weeks, within weeks. I was crying the whole night on the train. We went on the train through the different countries to the ship. And stopped in Paris, you know, stopped in Innsbruck. You know, for certain times, a couple nights or something. And came to Havre, Havre, in France.

LEVINE: La Havre, uh-huh.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: And what was the name of the ship?

RENNER: I really, it was the last trip of the boat.

LEVINE: Oh, Niagra. Niagra?

RENNER: Niagra? Maybe, maybe.

LEVINE: Although, um . . .

RENNER: Yes, because I told my husband later, the Niagra. It was the last trip of that ship.

LEVINE: Well, you mentioned earlier on your form that you left from Bordeaux.

RENNER: That's right.

LEVINE: Bordeaux, uh-huh. Okay.

RENNER: Where is La Havre?

MRS. RENNER'S DAUGHTER: One is the north and one is south.

LEVINE: Yeah. One would be north.

RENNER: I forgot, you know, little things. That was . . .

LEVINE: But you think it was Bordeaux.

RENNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, definitely.

LEVINE: Okay. So you, let's see. So you were travelling. Now, um, did you have any examinations before you got aboard the ship?

RENNER: No. But we got it in Castle Garden. In, you know, they called it Castle Garden.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about the voyage. What was that like?

RENNER: The voyage. We, a couple of days we were seasick. We were, we went not in first class but in the luggage.

LEVINE: Steerage.

RENNER: Steerage. And I remember the rats going on those limbs, and I would cover, you know, on fright. But we survived.

LEVINE: Were you in bunk beds?

RENNER: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what about food aboard the ship?

RENNER: Food, they gave food, but we couldn't eat when we were sick. It wasn't important, you know. I guess they gave us some food. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about the voyage? Anything that happened?

RENNER: Well, we were on deck and there were a lot of different people. Italian, and they sing, and I sang, you know. We made the best of it, young.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so what did you expect? Do you know what you, when you were aboard ship and you were coming to America, do you know what you expected?

RENNER: We expected we are young, we'll work, you know. Better than to go back to Kolomea. Otherwise we would have to go to Kolomea. If we wouldn't go to America, in Vienna they would send us back to Kolomea. So we came and we worked hard

and . . .

LEVINE: Well, do you remember when the ship pulled in to the New York Harbor?

RENNER: Of course.

LEVINE: What was your reaction?

RENNER: We were very happy, you know. When you're, I don't know how long the voyage took, maybe fourteen days on the ocean, you never think you'll see land. You know, were you ever on a boat?

LEVINE: Yes, yes. Yeah, I went from America to France.

RENNER: Well, for a trip.

LEVINE: But what did you think when you saw the buildings in New York?

RENNER: When we pulled in we were very happy to be, to land here now.

LEVINE: Did you know about the Statue of Liberty before you came into the country?

RENNER: Oh, sure. My mother, in Kolomea, my mother was always hoping that we'd leave Kolomea because there were anti-Semites,

you know. And she was a very wonderful woman. So for entertainment she would take in, let's say Saturday night, neighbors, and we would plan, tell stories, what's going on in America. They leave the milk at the front door, you know, things like that. And that was the entertainment.

LEVINE: I see. Can you remember any other stories that you heard in Kolomea about what went on in New York before you actually came here?

RENNER: No. You know, usually a person came from New York for a visit. Maybe had their family or parents, and he would explain what goes on in New York, and we just couldn't wait to see.

LEVINE: And do you remember how you experienced it when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

RENNER: Like I said, we were very happy to see my sister and helping, you know.

LEVINE: Then you were taken to New York. Then were you ferried out to Ellis Island? Did you take a ferry then?

RENNER: No. First we were in Ellis Island, and she came to Ellis Island to pick us up with the little boat, ferry or something.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, tell me your impression. When you first reached Ellis Island, what was it like?

RENNER: Well, we were hoping that everything would be fine. We were in good health, and that we'll pass, and we'll have a better life, you know. ( a doorbell rings ) That's my other daughter, I guess.

LEVINE: So you thought that you would pass. Was there a lot of confusion at Ellis Island?

RENNER: Let's see, dear. No, no, we passed, you know, the eyes, examination. And a day or two later my sister came to pick us up.

LEVINE: And do you remember what it was like to see your sister?

RENNER: Good, good. She came here in 1914, just before the war broke out, and she knew the circumstances, what went on. She was older, you know. So of course we were very happy to see her.

LEVINE: So she came there and met you then.

RENNER: Yes.

LEVINE: And then you went off the island with her.

RENNER: Yes. And she took us, of course, it wasn't, who is it?

LEVINE: She took you off the island.

RENNER: She took us off the island, but she brought us into a three-room apartment. She had a husband and two little children and us, five. My mother, father, sister, brother and me, five people. Of course, we brought a little belongings with us, and we would spread it on the floor and, you know, we would manage.

A neighbor took in one person to sleep over. It wasn't what we expected. We thought she was rich.

LEVINE: Did you bring anything with you besides clothing that you remember? Or did your mother or father or sister bring anything other than clothing that you remember?

RENNER: Uh, clothing and bedding. That was very important there in Europe because, to have bedding, you know. Bedding, and whatever I had.

LEVINE: So where was this apartment of your sister's?

RENNER: It was in Williamsburg, yes. And, on the plaza in Williamsburg. And my mother would go out shopping and she, to

Havermeyer Street in Williamsburg and she'd shop, you know. And she would cook, you know. So, and she got lost. She didn't know where to come back. So they asked her, "Where are you living?" So she said, in Jewish, "I live near (Yiddish)." There was a statue with a rider in front of a courthouse, so they brought her, people knew where the (Yiddish) is. A (Yiddish) is a horse. So they brought her home. And we lived there, and my sister started to work a little bit by, in millinery. And I worked, my brother-in-law had a factory in clothing. He gave me a job and paid a little bit. And my brother worked in pocketbooks. So we made a little money. We started to look for a place to rent for ourselves. So many people couldn't live in three rooms.

LEVINE: Now, was your brother with you aboard the ship?

RENNER: My brother was in Vienna when he was, came back from Italy when the war was over. He came back to Vienna. He was from Italy, from the battlefield.

LEVINE: I see.

RENNER: Yes.

LEVINE: So actually that meant that your whole family was here then?

RENNER: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So then you started looking for a place.

RENNER: Yes, and we found one. It was a cleaning store a few blocks away. In the front was a cleaning store and in the back maybe he had two rooms with a kitchen, so he rented it to us, but it was better than, yeah. And then we went higher and higher, lived there a little bit. My mother found a better place, you know. Could afford a little bit more rent, like eighteen dollars a month, you know, from fifteen. And we kept moving, moving. And then came the time where my husband was, my boyfriend from Vienna, was supposed to come.

LEVINE: Now, how did it happen that he came?

RENNER: Well, I told you. Made an affidavit for him and send him, and he was also approved. And he was two years, twenty-two, when he came here. And we got married here, and an apartment. He learned a trade. He became a furrier, and had ambition, and always reached higher and higher to become, from the machine, a cutter, you know, to make more money. And we decided to get married, you know. So I got married August 5th, after he came here, August 5th. And he made already then sixty-five dollars a week.

LEVINE: And what year was that?

RENNER: Well, it was '23.

LEVINE: '23.

RENNER: '22 or '23. 19, huh.

LEVINE: Let's see. Well, you came in 1920 in August.

RENNER: Yes. He came a year later.

LEVINE: A year later. Oh, okay. Uh-huh. So '21, then, he came, and then you were married in . . .

RENNER: August 5th.

LEVINE: August 5th in '22. Okay.

RENNER: And he learned, you know. And Saturday used to be payday, so he asked, he told me he's going to get a raise. So he said, "No, no, no." Like he'll lose the job, you know. He came home with the envelope and it wasn't open, I should have a surprise, and there was already a raise because he tried to learn. After work everybody went home, he would help clean up and sweep the floor, you know. Ambitious. And in years he went in business and did very well. And we raised a family.

LEVINE: How did your husband happen to choose to go into furs?

RENNER: Because he had an uncle that had somebody that gave him the job. He started with twenty-five dollars a week right away, but he didn't want to stay that. He went up into the market to get more. They would give him another five dollars, but he didn't want that. Like I said, after he swept, he went to the machine because he didn't know how to, he was never, he was an only child and they were well-to-do. He didn't work in Kolomea, you know. So he learned here the trade, and liked it, and grew with it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did your mother and father become citizens?

RENNER: No, wait a minute. My mother and father were old people. They didn't, I became a citizen. I became a citizen on my husband's first papers. Then they gave, you know, through your husband. I became a citizen after two years, maybe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how was learning English?

RENNER: We went to night school, both of us. And we learned quick. I mean, we tried to. And here I am. How am I doing?

LEVINE: Fine, you sound good.

RENNER: Thank you. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Okay. So then did you work?

RENNER: Here?

LEVINE: After you were married did you keep working?

RENNER: No. Because right away the baby came.

LEVINE: Now, what was your first baby? What was her name?

RENNER: Sylvia.

LEVINE: Sylvia.

RENNER: After my grandma.

LEVINE: And the next one?

RENNER: The next baby, that was this one, Lillian.

LEVINE: Lillian. And then?

RENNER: Judy.

LEVINE: Judy. And that's it. Three girls you had.

RENNER: Three girls.

LEVINE: Now, do you have grandchildren?

RENNER: I have the best. ( they laugh ) They're all professionals. Her husband is a professor in a college, community college, retired now. Another husband was, Sylvia's husband was with my husband in business, so he is now retired, and they have two daughters. One is a principal and one works for, for whom does he work? One is husband.

MRS. RENNER'S DAUGHTER: In computers.

RENNER: Computers. And they have two daughters, and they have four grandchildren. And the grandchildren are the best in first class. One A student.

LEVINE: These are now your great-grandchildren?

RENNER: I have a great-granddaughter twenty-one years old.

LEVINE: You have one great-grandchild?

RENNER: No!

LEVINE: How many?

RENNER: I have seven.

LEVINE: Seven, wow.

RENNER: No.

MRS. RENNER'S DAUGHTER: Seven grandchildren and six "great."

RENNER: With the two new ones?

LEVINE: Yeah, six "great."

RENNER: Okay.

LEVINE: Six great-grandchildren, and seven grandchildren. So you could possibly have some great-great-grandchildren.

RENNER: No. I'm ninety-one.

LEVINE: I know. You look great. Okay, let's see.

RENNER: Would you like a cold drink?

LEVINE: No. Why don't we finish talking and then maybe I'll have something. Were there any values that your mother and father kept that they wanted you to have?

RENNER: Values?

LEVINE: Even when you came to this country, were there things that they tried to instill in you that they wanted you to live by, ideas?

RENNER: Well, they couldn't, they couldn't. They didn't do much. I worked, you know. Maybe if they could I would have

done better. I don't know. Not, they did the best they could.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. I was just thinking if there were any things they taught you that they tried to instill in you, ideas?

RENNER: ( to her daughter ) What dear? Mother's sense of beauty. ( Mrs. Renner's daughter talks to her off mike. ) Well, that they, she instilled in me in Kolomea, that I'm smart and beautiful and curly hair, praise. ( Mrs. Renner's daughter talks to her off mike. ) And praising. And if I bought something for the, if the younger sister bought something without me, which she is also very handy because millineries, you see here everything is needlepoint, you know. So she was proud of her family. They did the best they could. I mean, missing because we didn't have no education, because we went to night school and I read a lot. I read. If I like a book, I can finish it in two days. That's fast. And good books, not junk. And TV, not too much, not what goes on, sex in the world, because it's not in my family, thank God. So I'm not interested.

LEVINE: Did you want to become Americanized when you came here, or did you want to keep some of your ways from Europe?

RENNER: No, no, no. I had very good ways in Vienna, you know. We bought the best clothes. In fact, when I came here and they

wanted to dress me, I didn't want to part with my clothes. Because in Vienna there were stores in the (?) Strasse that was in sixth (?). The finest store, like here Saks. I bought a nice outfit to go to America. I didn't want to part with it.

LEVINE: Can you remember the outfit you wore when you came to America?

RENNER: Oh, yeah. They have pictures from me. A nice flared skirt that I made myself. A blouse with a sailor collar which attached, it was navy blue. The suit has five lines and bow here, you know. Nice.

LEVINE: Was it a long skirt?

RENNER: No, no. You know. ( she indicates length of skirt )

LEVINE: Below the knee. Uh-huh. So you were always interested in having beautiful clothes.

RENNER: Nice things. I had a nice home, our own home, and when my husband, in years, you know, took sick, I lived in Brooklyn in a lovely apartment. I had to give it up because the children wanted me here. And I felt bad I have to part with stuff, you know. But as long come here, I'm happy. And thank God every day because I have a lot of things coming. She has a son that I would love. Every day I pray for something else. I

pray one grandson is married. Three are married, but one got married for fourteen, June fourteenth. So I prayed I should be there because it's not always peaches and honey, and many times I sick, I'm sick, but I don't complain, but I cure myself. Eating the right things. I go to the doctor. He tells me, "Bertha, you look good. Keep it up. Do everything that you are doing." So I hope to stay yet for a little bit more if God lets me.

LEVINE: What would you, is there anything you would say about the period in life called "old age?" How do you feel about this period in your life?

RENNER: I'm very proud of it. I'm very proud of it and I'm not lonely because these pictures were hanging. I have like the same atmosphere. And I'm not alone, and I'm not depressed. I'm just not!

LEVINE: You won't be. You don't want to be.

RENNER: No. Why? Everybody has to go through, even the king and queen, and which I'm very in touch with them, you know.

LEVINE: The king and queen.

RENNER: Oh, yeah. ( they laugh ) I'm surprised they didn't invite me, you know. I'm funny. This song was sang at my

children's wedding, and to every Passover. You know, they are sick of it, but they're (?). I think they recorded it. My, one of my grandsons recorded it. Show her, (?). Are you in a hurry? No, it's too much.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything, before we close, that you would like to say about.

RENNER: Only what you ask me, dear.

LEVINE: Yeah. Due to the fact of having come to this country and stayed here and become a citizen and lived your life here, are you pleased that you did that?

RENNER: Of course I did.

LEVINE: Do you think, had you stayed in Europe you would . . .

RENNER: I wouldn't reach what I had here, never, never. Because there was classes, you know, that the rich didn't want to marry the poor, you know. Even it was love, the father said, "I'll disown you if you marry me." If two certain people, ( a telephone rings ) so when the father died, he married the girl. I mean, love was always, you get me?

LEVINE: Yes, I do.

RENNER: He didn't get married while the father was living, but

then . . .

LEVINE: After.

RENNER: They kept company eight years. I mean, another certain case.

LEVINE: So there was a lot more freedom here.

RENNER: Wonderful, wonderful. Of course, a little thing I remember we came here. We always believed in saving, you know. Use so much, you know, furnishing that trip and everything, but save a little bit. So when I became a citizen the judge asked me, "Do you have bonds?" You know bonds.

LEVINE: Savings bonds.

RENNER: I said, "How much?" ( she laughs ) I had one, eighteen seventy-five. I mean, you asked me, so, is it important? Yes. That's all.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'd like to say thank you.

RENNER: You're very welcome.

LEVINE: For a wonderful talk. And this is Janet Levine, and I've been here with Bertha Renner at Franklin Square, New York, at her home. And it's July 19th 1992, and I'm signing off.

RENNER: Okay.

LEVINE: Thank you.

RENNER: Okay.