

EI-233

MARY HORVATH KUTI

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HUNGARY (BORN U.S.), 1921

AGE 13

PASSAGE ON "THE ADRIATIC"
PA

PORT: CHERBOURG

RESIDENCES: HUNGARY: KORMAND

US: ALLENTOWN,

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Kuti is the sister of Helen Harbove, interview EI-234.

LEVINE: This is . . .

KUTI: Well, can you play it back to us, and we hear it, what's on there?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KUTI: All right.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania at the home of Helen Horvath Harvald, and I'm here with Mrs. Harvald and her sister, Mrs. Kuti, and we're going to begin by an interview with Mrs. Mary Horvath Kuti, who was born in 1908 on April 20th, went to Hungary when she was two years old in 1910, stayed in Hungary for thirteen years until 1921. She's, she didn't stay thirteen years, she stayed eleven years,

and came back when she was thirteen years old.

KUTI: Yes, correct.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to hearing your story. Okay, why don't we start by you telling me where you were born?

KUTI: I was born in Bethlehem, P.A., 1908.

HARVALD: April.

KUTI: April 20th, 1908.

LEVINE: And you lived in Bethlehem for two years before . . .

KUTI: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And then what decided your mother and father to take you to Hungary?

KUTI: They thought that she would take me there and come back and make money and start their own business, like an American dream. But the war broke out. In 1914 there was no connection to Hungary, yes. And then after the war, of course, they missed me, and they came back in 1920, and then they didn't like it over there, so they came back to America, Allentown, Pennsylvania, and that's when I was brought here.

LEVINE: Now, do you know what decided them not to stay in Hungary?

KUTI: Well, they were here many years, and they liked America very much. And after the war Hungary was very hard to stay there if somebody was away from there. So that's the reason they come back.

LEVINE: Now, you were then in Hungary from the age of two to the age of thirteen.

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: And you were staying with your grandmother.

KUTI: Right.

LEVINE: What was your grandmother's name?

KUTI: Balint Agnes, Balint Agnes.

LEVINE: And this is your mother's mother.

KUTI: Mother, yes.

LEVINE: So that was your mother's maiden name, Agnes?

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And was your grandfather alive then?

KUTI: No, he wasn't living at that time. Only, my grandmother was a widow, and that's why she left me with her, so she'd raise me.

LEVINE: I see. Did you have other relatives around?

KUTI: Well, she had seven children, my grandmother. They lived around her. She lived alone in a big house by herself, and that's where I grew up, in Rabadoros Lubashneget.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

KUTI: Oh, I must write it down.

LEVINE: Okay, fine. We'll write it down, then. So when you were living with your grandmother, did you see other relatives when you were growing up?

KUTI: Yes, yes. But they lived around her in the village.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were there, were they a religious family?

KUTI: Very religious.

LEVINE: What religion did they practice?

KUTI: Catholic, and every Sunday we went to Mass, and every afternoon we went for a rosary recital. Oh, yeah. The whole family was very religious, yes. Catholic, Roman Catholic, yes.

LEVINE: And tell me, describe your grandmother. When you think of your grandmother, what are the qualities you think of? A sweet lady.

KUTI: She was the most beautiful and gorgeous lady. I even had to cry, because she taught me everything what I am. And she was, I don't believe I know another person. Very charming, and she had a lot of friends. And seven children, she had six girls and one boy.

LEVINE: Yeah. When you think of her, can you remember any experiences that you had with her when you were in Hungary?

KUTI: Well, I'll tell you, she, her father was a master in the church where she came from, and he was a teacher, too, and he never taught her to write or read. That was, at that time it was like that, but then her, now, like my mother, they came to America. When they would write letters to her, she would know who wrote the letter by the writing, but she couldn't read it, so she'd ask somebody else. Now, she had a son here, too, Michael, Uncle Michael. He would write a letter to her. She'd always say, "Now, this was Michael, and this was Agnes." My mother's name was Agnes, and my grandmother was named Agnes. She was so far advanced with her mind, and she's the one that raised me.

LEVINE: Well . . . So your memories of her are very pleasant.

KUTI: All the time.

LEVINE: And can you describe the house she lived in, and that you were living in?

KUTI: Yes. We had one of those real big old-fashioned houses, and then we had a beautiful walnut tree on the side. We had three big cherry trees. We knew that house from far, far. There was one red cherry tree, a yellow and a black. And we had a lot of pear trees. We had a big, big fruit tree yard. And I enjoyed it so much. (she laughs) And that's where I grew up.

LEVINE: So then you must have been fluent in Hungarian.

KUTI: Oh, yes, Hungarian.

LEVINE: And you went to school there?

KUTI: Right.

LEVINE: And can you talk about the school, what was that like?

KUTI: Well, the school was in another village. I lived in Rabadoros, and the school was in Lubashneget, so we had to go Lubashneget to go to school, and that's where we went. It was pretty far, but we walked. We had to walk.

LEVINE: Was it like, what? How many miles, around?

KUTI: It was about a mile or two, but that's where the smallest villages, see, I was in a small village, now, that was a bigger village, so all these small villages would come to that one big school. And that's where I grew up.

LEVINE: Now, was this a Catholic school?

KUTI: Yes, and a Catholic big church, and the school was combined. And the cemetery and all, it was all in one place.

LEVINE: Now, were most of the people in the community, in those villages, were they Roman Catholic?

KUTI: All of them. All of them. We never heard of any other religion but Catholic. It was all Catholic.

LEVINE: And can you remember your grandmother, anything she cooked that you particularly liked when you were little?

KUTI: She used to make seven bread a week, one of those big old-fashioned. And they had this oven, it's a big one like they make the pizza pies, whatever. Every, well, we were, in the family, many of us. They would come, her daughters, or whatever, but bread, everybody went for bread, and she made this rye bread, beautiful. And, of course, she cooked, like everybody else, made goulash, chicken soup, and all this Hungarian food. And a lot of pastries, biscuits. She used to make biscuits. All this, and sausage. And, of course, ham. Once a year they'd kill a big pig. That was a big fest, for everybody in the village, not only we did that. And that was . . .

LEVINE: Each town?

KUTI: Each family, for their own family, and that was a big feast day. Now, when they killed in one house, they would take some over to the next house. When they killed they would bring it back. It was so nice.

LEVINE: And what did most people do for a living?

KUTI: They all owned their own grounds. My grandmother was pretty wealthy, and they had helpers who would dig the ground and whatever, it had to be the hard work. She was around the house always, and that's what everybody did, their own farming, like. You know, they raised all their own wheat and corn and all, and you worked on the farm like that. It was all your own.

LEVINE: Did you have farm animals besides . . .

KUTI: Oh, yes. We had pigs and goats and cows. We didn't have a horse, but when Uncle Mike would come home from America the first thing he buyed two horses.
(she laughs) It was a lot of fun, yes.

LEVINE: What else did you do for fun when you were there?

KUTI: Well, I was a swimmer, and we had a big river coming down, and a small river went into the big river, and that was called a rabo, rabo. They called that a rabo, yes. And then this was a smaller river, and this was what we did, and fished in there, and in the summer you swim in there. It was real beautiful. And a lot of forests, they had in. And, you know,

children like to go to forests, and that's what we enjoyed a lot. And we went, they said picnicking now.

But at that time we went like a day out, and my grandmother would make us a bag of whatever, a package, and we'd go out and eat in a farm in the forest. I'm sorry. (voices are heard off mike) Oh, my uncle was a housa. You know what that is? It's like marine over here, but that's in Hungarian, a housa. Oh, he was . . .

HARVALD: They wore those beautiful uniforms.

KUTI: Oh . . .

HARVALD: And he had a horse.

KUTI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: This is in Hungary?

KUTI: In Hungary, yeah.

LEVINE: In the uniform?

KUTI: Yes. And then he lived, you know, my grandmother lived with him because it was her son, and he had one son. We all lived in that, it was a big house, yes. Well, you had to have stables for the cows, chickens and the pigs and all that. But the whole villages was like that, individually a family had this.

LEVINE: So it doesn't sound like money was used that much.

Did people barter, or how did . . .

KUTI: No. They would sell, now, like if they would need one big pig to kill, they'd raise two. So then they sell this one, and then they get this money for seeds to put in the ground and whatever. And then they had a lot of chickens, they would sell eggs. And that came money for the kitchen, or whatever.

HARVALD: We didn't pay anything for taxes. She raised the geese on the water.

KUTI: Yeah, my brother . . .

HARVALD: That was (?).

KUTI: She used to raise a lot of geese and ducks, and I had to go and take care of them, put them under the water. It was a lot of fun. And then they would sell them when they get all big, and they would sell it. That was their money.

LEVINE: For the taxes.

KUTI: Yes, to pay the taxes on the house, yes.

LEVINE: Now, what did you have to do with these geese? What was your job?

KUTI: She raised them big. Well, the . . .

LEVINE: Your job.

KUTI: My job.

HARVALD: The water ran through her property, remember?

KUTI: Right. And the geese, they'd go on the water, and they'd grow big like the, well, here, you know what the geese is. And then they'd sell them. They'd take it to a market and sell the geeses. Of course, they'd keep so much for the family, you know, but they would sell it. And then they picked the feather off the geeses and made beautiful feather pillows. That was a winter job when you didn't have what to do, then you'd invite the labor ladies and they'd pick these feathers to make the feather pillows. And every time a girl would get married from the family, she was equipped with feather pillows and comforts and all this. And the thing is that she used to weave the cotton to make bag and sheets and all that. That was wintertime. In the summer you worked outside, but all winter you couldn't be in the house doing nothing. So this is what all the ladies in the village would do that.

LEVINE: Well, now, what kind of jobs or tasks did you have to do when you were living with your grandmother? Did you have certain jobs that you . . .

KUTI: Yes, take the cows out on the green pasture and watch them. She'd make me a little lunch, and you'd have to be with them so they'd eat good, so they'd give good milk in the evening. And we had six goats, and that's, of course, it was beautiful, really. I have

such a good dream of it, I tell you. I had a beautiful life, yes.

LEVINE: So you took care of the goats as well?

KUTI: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And that was also making sure they ate the right thing.

KUTI: That's right, yes. And then that they don't go further into other people's property. You know, you have your own, and they could only be there. So the other people had a girl or a boy taking care of theirs, so they didn't get mingled, the animals. We had to take care of our own. And, of course, in the evening you had to feed the chickens and the pigs and the horse and whatever, give them food. And, of course, and then they caught hay, you know. They had the hay for the animals, yes.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of? You must have had friends.

KUTI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What kinds of things did you do, like, when you were with your friends?

KUTI: Well, you know, I had friends, we used to knit a lot. I would knit one stocking a day. Would you believe me? And my aunt would knit the other one. They were

so beautiful. With all designs, so then there was a village where they couldn't do that, so they come and bought it from us. Like for Easter or Christmas you make those warm woolen stockings and they would come and buy it from us. And for Easter, pink, blue, white and whatever the sweaters. Like they have now, I tell her how it reminds me of knitting a stocking a day. (she laughs) It was, and, you know, and crocheting these shawls and all. That was in wintertime. In summer you couldn't do that, because it was too hot. But all winter you were working this for a year ahead of time.

LEVINE: Now, would you do this with your friends? Would you get together and do this?

KUTI: Our friends, and I had this Aunt Elizabeth, the one picture here.

HARVALD: This one picture.

KUTI: She was the one who teach me and the others. And you have, when they said you have to knit, you had to sit down and knit, you know. You couldn't say, "No." (she laughs) It was strictly order. And I'm so glad that they did. I often tell her, you know.

LEVINE: Now, was your grandmother strict?

KUTI: She would sit at mills.

HARVALD: Weave, weave. They make their own linen.

KUTI: Yeah, all linen.

HARVALD: From hemp, they raised the hemp and . . .

KUTI: Hang. And then they tied up on the pole, and she had these, whatever this is called.

HARVALD: The spinning wheel.

KUTI: Spinning wheel, and she'd sit there days, you know, just pulling this down and making fine threads, or whatever she wanted. If she wanted a tablecloth like this, you had to make a heavy thread. If you wanted a bag, that's heavier. But if you wanted a fine, for pillowcase or a beautiful dress, then you'd do it fine. That's what she did.

LEVINE: Can you remember the whole process?

KUTI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: From the growing of the hemp?

KUTI: It's called a lem, in Hungarian, a seed. Then in the spring, you know, you put it in the ground and it grows so beautiful, blue flowers, it has, this lem. And when that gets all the flower off . . .

HARVALD: Blooms.

KUTI: Blooms. Then you have to, by hand, pick it out and

make a little bundle, like this. Then you tie it up and lay the lem down.

HARVALD: Into the water.

KUTI: Then you take it home, and we had a big bowl, like water. Then we had to take this lem, the way it's bundled up. You lay it in the water, because this lem had straws on it. Then when you lay it in the water that has, I don't know how long you have to lay it in the water, that all rotted down. Then we had to go and get this out, these bundles, and open it up and get all the straw out of it, and it becomes a beautiful lem, thread, whatever. Yeah.

HARVALD: Yarn.

KUTI: Yeah, yarn, right. And then that's what you did. It was natural, from everything else, linen.

LEVINE: And how did you make it, how did you get it so it was thinner or thicker, depending on what you wanted?

KUTI: Well, you had this, one of these with forks. Then when you have this, dried up this bundle of linen, then you chopped it in there and pulled it, like hold it, and all that straw would come out. That's just like your hair, the linen, it's so fine. And, again, you always have to put it in bundles so it's easy to handle.

LEVINE: And how did, I don't understand, how did it get to be

like a long, attached yarn?

HARVALD: A spinning wheel.

KUTI: A spinning wheel. You have this . . .

HARVALD: You attach it and then you keep . . .

KUTI: (Hungarian)

HARVALD: A spinning wheel.

KUTI: A spinning wheel, had a spool on this big. And then when she started it she wrapped it on that, her spool, and she had fun doing this, and that would, we have pinched and punched it, and that would roll and roll and roll until that spool. Then she gets another one. Oh, a lot of them, like that you had to do them, because you made a log. It was like fun, it was beautiful, really.

LEVINE: So was your clothing home made, then?

KUTI: Yes! Oh, for the men, they made the most beautiful white pants like they were, but they made them this wide. One leg of a man's pants was this wide, and then, of course, all the women made that for their husbands, children, whatever, and then when they washed that they would lay these pants out and they'd put a pleat in it, and then put something, heavy weight on it, they knew how long. When they wore it it was like a pleated skirt for the men, all white,

beautiful. And, of course, the white shirt. It was big, like hanging. I guess being the weather was so warm that it's loose. It didn't make your body hot. It was beautiful. Oh, beautiful blouses and things they made out of that linen, what they made, yes.

LEVINE: Crocheted, too?

KUTI: Oh, yes, crocheted. And big shawls for winter, you know. They made these heavy shawls. They made bedspreads and tablecloths and everything they made out of that. And, of course, then it came later if you wanted to dye it you could buy dye and make any color you wanted, but my grandmother liked white, we liked white. But you could do blue, black, green, whatever.

LEVINE: Were they natural dyes, or were they artificial dyes?

KUTI: You had to buy that. The dye you had to buy, and they told you how to dye it. And that's why Grandmother says, "Why should we work with it and spend money on it when it's so beautiful when it's white?" That was her idea, but some other women, they made colors, oh, yes.

LEVINE: Well, now, how did your mother, grandmother, do the laundry?

KUTI: Oh . . . (she laughs) We had this river. And then on that river there were boards like this, pretty far in. Then you'd gather all your wash, then you'd take

this down in big baskets. Then whoever the woman stands here and soaks all this in a tub. And when you soak that, then you take it here to the end of the board and you start chopping it. You see maybe in the movies sometimes how they do it.

LEVINE: They're hitting the actual clothing against the board?

HARVALD: Beating it.

KUTI: Beating it.

HARVALD: With a wooden stick. They beat it with a wooden stick, right?

KUTI: Yeah, so the dirt. And then, of course, you dunk it and raise it, dunk it and raise it, until it got clean. And they take it home, and they have this beautiful big fences, nothing, line or anything. Bushy fences. Everybody had it, so you couldn't look over to the next door. So then they put this on the fence and dry it.

LEVINE: Would there be like bushes?

KUTI: Yes, like here they have some heavy fence.

HARVALD: Hedges.

KUTI: Hedges, right. And they just, the hedges weren't dirty because there was no factory around here, so they laid it all on the fences to have it dried.

That's how they dried it.

LEVINE: And did they use soap in the river?

KUTI: How they made soap is they all had firewood. And when your fire goes down you had ashes, right. Well, in that ash, they saved. And everybody had a big wooden tub. Then that ash, you put water on the night before. And that, the day you go washing you take the water off. That's what the soap was over there. Yeah, that's what it was.

LEVINE: So, in other words, was there any running water in the house?

KUTI: Oh, the well. Everybody had wells.

LEVINE: In the house, or outside the house?

KUTI: Outside, outside. We had our own, but there was one in the middle of the village, and maybe two, three people went to get there. But my uncle was, he could drill his own well, so we had the well in our yard. Yeah.

LEVINE: So your uncle, was he, he was kind of the man of the house.

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: And was he off in the army?

KUTI: He was single when, that was when he was single. He was in the service, yes.

LEVINE: And then he came back, and then did he farm the land? Is that what he did?

KUTI: Same. And then he came to America and he married here, and then he came home with his wife, and they had one son.

HARVALD: And they stayed in Europe, then.

KUTI: And he had built another new, beautiful home out of . . .

HARVALD: Very modern.

KUTI: Yeah. They were really very well-to-do, yeah.

LEVINE: So you were rather comfortable.

KUTI: Oh, yes. I loved it. Oh, yes. Very happy. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So then your mother and father came back for you after the war was over.

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: And had you been getting letters from them when they . . .

KUTI: Well, they couldn't, there wasn't, no, there's no, you couldn't.

LEVINE: So you really didn't hear from them for several years.

KUTI: No, no.

LEVINE: So when you then, when they came back, when they first came back they were planning to stay.

KUTI: America, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: When they first came back to Hungary to get you, were they planning to stay in Hungary then?

KUTI: Well, they thought, they said that if they like it. But, you know, after the war was so much changes, and my father could not get used to that. And they stayed over a year, but they still couldn't get used to it. They were, you know, in America, having dollars to go to work, and it was beautiful, so then they talked it out and they came back. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember what they told you about America before you actually ever came here?

KUTI: No, they really didn't talk about it much, because I wouldn't have understand it. I was thirteen years old, no.

LEVINE: Now, your mother's maiden name . . .

KUTI: Is Balint.

LEVINE: B-A . . .

KUTI: L-I-N-T, Balint.

LEVINE: Okay. And her first name?

KUTI: Agnes.

LEVINE: Agnes. And your father's name?

KUTI: Charles, Carl. He was always called Carl. He was Carl, yeah, yeah, Carl.

LEVINE: And do you remember planning to leave? Do you remember anything you packed to take with you?

KUTI: Oh, yes. To bring here.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KUTI: Oh, yes. My mother had a big trunk. Remember, we had it a long time, as big as this. (she laughs) The trunk, and we put many beautiful things. And before we came there was a beautiful dressmaker lady there. I remember she had made me a beautiful blue dress, if you remember.

HARVALD: I remember this pink one.

KUTI: And a pink checkered one, and a white one, and also

for her. And that's what we brought here to America.

And, you know, they were wondering, "Where did we get it?" Of course, that was made by hand in Europe.

They made beautiful things by hand. Of course, here's machine making everything, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else that your mother packed to take back with her?

KUTI: Well, I'll tell you. We had chicken, and she fried a big chicken. But, of course, on material, I don't remember. She brought tablecloths and . . .

HARVALD: A nice tablecloth for church.

KUTI: She brought for the altar.

HARVALD: A lace tablecloth.

KUTI: Yes, a beautiful one. And, well, all the things we needed.

LEVINE: Well, now, your sister Helen came back with your mother and father.

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: So that was the first time you ever saw her.

KUTI: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was like to have a baby

sister?

KUTI: I tell you, they came in the evening, and my grandmother said, "Oh, your mother is here, and you have a sister (?)." And we got up, and when we looked at each other, remember, we talked. And right away I gave you a doll, didn't I?

HARVALD: I don't remember.

LEVINE: I did. I gave her a doll, because I was saving that doll in Europe, and she just looked at me and I looked at her, and they told me, "Now, that's your sister." (they laugh) I had a doll for her. That's what I remember. Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember leaving?

KUTI: Yes. It was winter, and in Europe when it snows it's really high. Oh, so when we left Pop had to get a, one of those beautiful coaches. I don't know what they're called here, because, coach. With one of those, one- or two-horse, I don't know, two horses. Because the post, where we went to go on our training was pretty far and was dangerous because the highway was so piled with snow, you couldn't walk or anything. So he had to order a coach with two horses. And, of course, we had to bring this big, whatever.

HARVALD: Trunk.

KUTI: Yeah, a trunk. Then my mother and father and Helen

and I . . .

HARVALD: And another little girl.

KUTI: Yes, a friend's daughter, we had to bring. Now, we didn't have to, but they asked if we could bring her along. And we went, oh, I don't know how many miles to the train station, and from there we went on, again on first class on a train. And we went to Paris. It's strange.

LEVINE: (??)

HARVALD: Budapest, and our aunt, we had an aunt in Budapest.

KUTI: A beautiful aunt.

HARVALD: And she brought a bread, I'll never forget it, I swear it was two feet in diameter.

KUTI: Yeah.

HARVALD: On the train.

KUTI: For us to . . .

HARVALD: For us to eat along the way, which we did.

KUTI: And, of course, crying and screaming that you have to leave them there. It was hard.

LEVINE: It must have been hard for you to leave your

grandmother.

KUTI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So do you remember the train ride at all?

KUTI: Oh, sure I do. Oh, yes, yes. And, you know, it's so different there than first class, because not many goes on first class.

LEVINE: Can you describe what it was like to come . . .

KUTI: Oh, it was beautiful, a lot of brass. And then, of course, the seats are like this. They're like this, and you have a table here. It's almost like a nice sitting room. It was beautiful, yes.

LEVINE: And then you went all the way to Paris?

KUTI: All the way to Paris. We didn't change nowhere. We went straight through.

LEVINE: And then you got off in Paris?

KUTI: Yes.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

HARVALD: I think, where is the airport over there?

LEVINE: (?) airport? Is it on that side?

HARVALD: No, no, no. The seaport.

LEVINE: Oh, Cherbourg?

HARVALD: Cherbourg. That's where we went, Cherbourg.

KUTI: Cherbourg, yes.

HARVALD: Cherbourg, yes.

KUTI: Well, from there somebody was waiting for us, and they took us to a beautiful hotel.

HARVALD: Oh, it was gorgeous.

KUTI: It was a beautiful hotel. We stayed there two weeks.

HARVALD: And everything was in burgundy color. (voices off mike) (they laugh)

LEVINE: Do you think we should do it all?

HARVALD: Well, can I just . . .

LEVINE: Well, you can, I think it would be interesting for you to tell yours because you're going to give the child's perspective. It's a little different.

HARVALD: That's right. I'm sorry to interrupt.

LEVINE: That's okay. Okay. So then you stayed for two weeks.

KUTI: Two weeks.

LEVINE: Because you had to get your papers, or do you remember
(?)?

KUTI: The boat or whatever happened, we just had to stay.

HARVALD: We were too early.

KUTI: Yes, we were too early, or what we were, in two weeks.
And we used to go out and watch the ocean and all
that, but we had to stay there two weeks. Why a boat
didn't come in, I don't know what that was.

LEVINE: Do you remember things that struck you as different
that you had never seen before when you, once you
started on this trip, did you see things that . . .

KUTI: Well, in Paris, what was the name of that big
mountains we went.

HARVALD: The Gibraltar, she's saying.

KUTI: Yes.

HARVALD: We were on the boat when that happened.

KUTI: And then, of course, every morning we had nothing to
do but go out and watch fishing. People were fishing,
and it was so interesting, because where I come from

they didn't have this ocean to fish in. So there were people lined up, fresh fish. They were taken, every day they had fresh fish. So did we, in the hotel, any kind you wanted. It was beautiful. That's what it's, and it was a beautiful place, Paris, Cherbourg, yes. It was lovely.

LEVINE: And so then when the ship came, what was the name of it?

KUTI: Adriatic.

LEVINE: And you . . .

KUTI: Cunard Line. France Cunard Line. I don't know, that's what it was. It's in the book, too.

LEVINE: And what were your accommodations on the ship?

KUTI: We came first class. Again, it was the most beautiful boat, well, that's the only time. I was on the weekend first class.

LEVINE: And do you remember your sleeping arrangements?

KUTI: Yes. We had a beautiful bedroom.

HARVALD: Cabin.

KUTI: Cabin, whatever. And then we, of course, it was elevated or what. It was just beautiful. And, of course, every day we went on the top, on the deck.

And that's where they were playing people, and a lot of movie stars were. I remember a girl, there was a pool there, a swimming pool. And she put on a bathing suit, you know, it was such a new thing for me to see coming from that part. And here she dived in that pool, and she broke her nose. (they laugh)

HARVALD: I don't remember that.

LEVINE: You had never seen a bathing suit before?

KUTI: Not like that, you know. In Europe they wore them long, like a skirt, and up here like a blouse. But she had one of these cut out, and short pants. You know, you wonder what's going on. Of course, I was so young, and we just stared at her. But that was an American style, yes. It was beautiful.

LEVINE: And the food?

KUTI: Oh, it was delicious. Oh, it was, we had our own waiter for our table. We had a big, round table. We were five of us, breakfast, dinner, lunch, whatever. It was real nice, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences on the boat?

KUTI: Yes. One day my mother said, and father, "Let's go out and see the sea." And that day the porpoises, whatever, they were going like pigs, all in a line, and so beautiful it was. And then my mother said, "You wait. Tomorrow we're going to have a storm."

And, you know, next day the boat was going like this.

(she gestures) When we went to the dining room all our plates were in wooden boxes built, no soup or anything like that, because, and the whole day. And, oh, I was so afraid. I thought, "We're sure going under." (a bell chimes) But, thank God we survived from that. But that was something to see, yes.

LEVINE: Now, were there steerage passengers on the ship?

KUTI: Yes.

LEVINE: You could see them.

KUTI: Oh, yes. We couldn't go down. We didn't want to go down. But on the (?) we, you know, we walked around on the boat and all that. Oh, yeah. It was full, a lot of people on it.

LEVINE: Can you describe what it looked like to you, what the steerage . . .

KUTI: Well, on that first class, I remember those big chimneys. It had three big chimneys, and we used to run around that, and that's where one of the movie stars fell, too, and broke an arm or what. Because they were so active running around, I guess you can't just sit in your cabin, you know. So you had to do something, and they were running around, and two bumped, and one fell down and, I think, broke an arm. And then a little boy died, a twelve-year-old boy. So that goes, they tell everybody in the hallway. A

man came and announced it. And I said to my mother, "I'm going to watch this funeral, how they bury him."

Do you remember that? And here they bring this body up in a wooden box, and they say it has weight in it, so when they put him in. Well, anyway, the captain buries it. All these, whoever works on the boat, they all have to come out and lie in their beautiful, whatever they were. They're all lined up and the captain, and there was a minister there, too, said a prayer. And then the mother was there and the relations. And they hold out something . . .

(voices off mike) Something, a pole, yeah, was at the end, and that bottom reaches the ocean, the water.

So then the captain is up here and the priests and all, and they bless him and they put this wooden box on the top, and they slide him in the water. That was heartbreaking for me. And the mother, she passed out and, you know, it was real sad. And I asked, I says to her, "What's going to happen to that boy?" They said, "Well, the fish will eat him." Whatever, they just told me that because I was so worried about that.

He was sick and he died on the boat, a twelve-year-old boy, it was.

LEVINE: And what did it look like to you to look down and see all these people, because they were, there were a lot of people in one small place, right? Do you have your impression of that?

KUTI: It was like a village, really. And they had these chairs out there, they would sit, and they'd make it a walk. And then so many people would throw up, but

there was always somebody cleaning up, but I never got sick. None of us got sick on it. It never bothered us. But there were a lot of, especially the first two days when the boat started to go out. And we were eight days on the ocean. By the seventh day I said there is nothing in the world but ocean and water. And I used to ask, "When are we getting off of here?"

And my mother would say, "We'll get off someday." "Yeah, but when?" "About eight days." And when they were coming home, they were twelve. How long were you on the water? A month.

HARVALD: Thirty days.

KUTI: A month, yeah.

HARVALD: Maybe on the (?).

KUTI: Yeah, a month, coming to Hungary. But the coming back, it was modern, very modern, whatever. And eight days we were, we didn't see nothing but water, water, all the time.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you came into the New York Harbor?

KUTI: Yeah. They said that they saw these buildings and all. And thank God, yes, that we see something. You know, I said, "Well, now we're really getting someplace. Oh, yes."

LEVINE: Did you know what the Statue of Liberty was before?

KUTI: Yes.

HARVALD: My father would explain.

LEVINE: Yes. He'd explain, yeah. "When you see that, you're in America." (she laughs) And happy landings.

HARVALD: Everybody's cheering.

KUTI: Oh, yes. Some cried, some were happy.

HARVALD: Oh, yeah.

KUTI: It was beautiful. Yes, it was.

LEVINE: And then do you remember going to Ellis Island?

KUTI: Yeah.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

KUTI: Well, we had to go in. It was a big building and, of course, they had these people there who'd look your passport over, and we came at I don't know what time, but whoever was checking this book, he said it got too late till we got there, and he closed it, and he says, anyway, it was Christmas.

LEVINE: Christmas Day?

KUTI: Christmas . . .

HARVALD: No, no, no. It wasn't Christmas.

KUTI: No, it wasn't. It was Christmas time, but it was two weeks before Christmas. It was two weeks before Christmas. And he said, he didn't have time to listen to all these stories, what everybody was giving. And then some would get off and some would stay back, and he kept us all in. He says, "In two weeks' time we have to come back and they'll check us out." So we had to go back again to the Ellis Island. Of course, that was the first time, and we were in a big auditorium. And when evening came, but in the day time we all ate in one big place with tables, very long. And then they came with a paper, roll paper. They would roll it out, and they would give you cakes and you'd eat. And after you, we got milk all the time. After you were finished they'd come and roll these paper up with paper towels, uh, paper plates, they had. Then, of course, after that you were on your own. And in the evening, when evening came the women went separate and the men, but the children could go with the parents, like mother or father. But the men were all separate. They could never come where we were sleeping. And they had to get bunks, about four layers. You sleep top of each other. And every night a man, a couple of men came with the gallons of milk, and everybody got a glass of milk to go to bed. It was nice.

LEVINE: Was the food good?

KUTI: Yes, it was. It was delicious.

LEVINE: And was the place clean?

HARVALD: Very.

KUTI: Yes, it was.

HARVALD: Very clean.

KUTI: I'm telling you, every day I seen . . .

HARVALD: They were cleaning constantly.

KUTI: They didn't do it with cloth, you know, so they did this with a white paper. It was nice.

LEVINE: Now, you had to stay, as far as you know, you had to stay because there wasn't time to process . . .

KUTI: To process it, right.

HARVALD: About the luggage?

KUTI: Well, the luggage was with us.

HARVALD: I know. But what happened was my, do you want me to . . .

LEVINE: Why don't you tell on your . . .

HARVALD: All right. And you tell what you remember.

KUTI: Yeah. Well . . .

LEVINE: Anything else you remember about Ellis Island, about your stay there?

KUTI: Well, on Christmas we had a big party. You want to tell that.

HARVALD: Oh, no. You tell, Mary. You're very good.

KUTI: Oh, it was so beautiful, you know, Christmas trees and all, which we didn't see in Europe something, it was heaven, really. And then Caruso was singing. Remember, now, how beautiful that can be.

HARVALD: I think that stage is still there, isn't it?

LEVINE: Was it in the Great Hall?

HARVALD: It had to be.

KUTI: Yes, the Great Hall. And then, of course, a lot of Santa Clauses. And, you know, we didn't know what that, we thought it was a real Santa Claus.
(she laughs) And then they would come with bags, and we got a lot of toys and candy and everything we got. It was so beautiful.

LEVINE: Were there lots of people there?

KUTI: Oh, the Hall was full.

HARVALD: Full.

KUTI: The whole boat of people who was on that boat that we were all there, yes, yes. It was something.

LEVINE: So then you stayed for two weeks?

KUTI: Two weeks.

LEVINE: And then you left after Christmas?

HARVALD: My uncle came for us, Shavla.

KUTI: Yeah, we had an uncle, and he came.

HARVALD: He was from Bethlehem.

LEVINE: And he came in a car, or how did he come?

KUTI: No, we come home by train, Black Diamond.
(they laugh) No. Yes. We, wherever we got off it is Ellis Island. I don't know if we walked. It wasn't far. We went on a, I'll never forget my father says, "You know what this is in America?" I said, "No." He says, "That's a Black Diamond." I'll never forget.

HARVALD: (?)

KUTI: Black diamond. That's what he said. And that's what we came to Allentown, on the Black Diamond, and that

didn't stop nowhere, it come direct to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about that train ride?

KUTI: Oh, yes. It was like heaven. And then when we came to Allentown, of course, my father and mother knew, they came to (?). And we got here night time. And when we got there they were all in bed. And my father knocked, and here they come down. They were, like, you know, all mixed up. They didn't know. They thought it was a dream, yes. And we stayed with them a couple of months until we got organized our lives, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impressions of anything in America that struck you as different from anything you had seen in Europe?

KUTI: I remember she had, Limanin had a daughter, Katie. And wherever she went, she took me. And when we were walking on the street they would talk English, naturally, and I didn't. And I would listen so hard, and I would say, "But what did they say? What are they talking about? She says, "Well, wait till you learn. You're going to know what." She would never tell me, and I was so anxious to know. And, you know, in one year's time I speak perfect English, because I wanted to know what they're talking about.
(she laughs) And my mother was so mad, she says, "I'm here so long, I can't learn, and look how quick."
And I said to my mother, "You know what? When you hear one word like 'hot' or 'cold,'" I says, "now,

just keep that one word." And overnight I would be, "Hot, hot, hot, cold." And tomorrow I'm going to add that together, and then I keep, this is how. And I told my mother, and my mother says, "I'm trying it, but it don't work for me." (they laugh)

LEVINE: And what was school like? Did you go to school?

KUTI: I had to. They put me through school, but they explained that I don't speak English, so naturally I was in a desk, and I just sat there. And they told the teacher why I had to put the time in. But I couldn't read or write, and I went home with children who lived near, and I couldn't do anything in school.

LEVINE: Were there other children in your class who also couldn't speak English?

KUTI: Hungarian, there were a couple of them. And, you know, we ganged up. (she laughs) Because we talked Hungarian. And they told us, "You (?)." You know, you got to learn it. But how can you learn a language in one month? Tell me. It was hard. That was real hard to learn. But I learned English. One year, I was perfect, thinking I was surprised myself, I tell you. Yes. Of course, I had an accent even now after six years. (she laughs) I couldn't get rid of it.

LEVINE: It sounds good.

KUTI: Oh, thank you. (they laugh) No matter where I go

they always say, "What language do you speak?" You know. And I know right away that I don't say it the way it should be.

LEVINE: Well, now, okay. So when, is there, okay. Well, then you stayed in school for how long?

KUTI: Well, until I was fourteen. And then the law came that you had to go continuation school like once a week, and I picked Wednesdays. So once a week I went to school. I can't sit there, because I didn't understand writing and whatever, reading. But then we had a good friend. She took me to a place where they would give me a little job, and that's what I learned.

HARVALD: They took you into the soap mill.

KUTI: Well, first of all, they took me, that Yuhas girl.

HARVALD: Oh, the millinery.

KUTI: Millinery. They thought, you know, they pitted me. Then after that we had a friend whose name was Carmen Contro, and he was the silk weaver. And he said to my mother, "Can I pick Mary in for learning how to weave silk?" Oh, I was happy for that. And I loved weaving silk. So he took me into the silk mill. And that time that was the thing, in 1928, '27. That was a big thing.

HARVALD: You went to school longer than one year, Mary.

KUTI: Well, I went to continuation school once a week.

HARVALD: I think you went more. Excuse us for a minute.

KUTI: And then I learned weaving. I had six looms. Would you believe, six looms, I was so good at it. Of course, after that I met my husband.

LEVINE: How did you meet him?

KUTI: Oh, it's a big story.

HARVALD: A lovely story, too. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Let's see. We've got about ten minutes, so . . .

KUTI: But we have a masquerade ball. It's the Hungarian Club. And I wanted to be a husad. One of those . . .

HARVALD: What my uncle was.

KUTI: Yeah. And I know they had in Bethlehem this costume. And I said to my girlfriend, "Let's go and rent this costume, and then we went there and my husband was a single fellow, and he was the one who's renting it."
(they laugh)

HARVALD: From the Hungarian hall in Bethlehem.

KUTI: Yes. And, you know, I wanted these big boots, because they were boots for soldiers. And he says, "You know, you're lucky. We just got this pair of boots from

Hungary." And I said, "Good." And it just hit me, and I took that and the uniform, and he came to the masquerade ball. And then, of course, we met there.

LEVINE: What was her dressed up as?

KUTI: A hobo. (Mrs. Harvald laughs) And he had one of these potties, children's potties. And he had a yard of hot dogs on his neck, and he had this yellow French mustard in there. And he would take this, dip it in and eat it. People were not . . . (she laughs) He was so bad. And he won the first prize, and I won the first prize on the ladies at that masquerade ball. So after, when we were married, I used to say, "Well, why did you marry me?" He says, "You know what? When you first tried those boots on I said to myself, "I'm going to marry this girl." (she laughs) That's how we got married.

LEVINE: And then how many children did you have?

KUTI: One boy.

LEVINE: And his name?

KUTI: Joseph Kuti . . .

HARVALD: Junior.

KUTI: Junior.

LEVINE: And now does he have children?

KUTI: Seven. And they adopted this little girl. Of course, she's sixteen now, so he has eight. But they're married off, and they live around him. And this . . .

HARVALD: In Chicago.

KUTI: Yeah, in Chicago. And just Jennifer is home. And . . .

LEVINE: Do any of your grandchildren have children?

KUTI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So how many great-grandchildren?

HARVALD: All together, Mary. (they laugh) We laugh a lot, though.

KUTI: Well, (?) Well, whatever. This is a great-grandchild now, the one who's at home.

HARVALD: Jennifer.

KUTI: Jennifer is a great-grandchild. Oh, she's beautiful. And I love her, and she loves me.

HARVALD: It's really her great-grandchild, because Laurie was divorced, and they adopted her little daughter.

KUTI: That's how is it. And now she wants to be a psychologist, would you believe it? I can't believe

it. I'm trying to talk her out, but she wants it.

HARVALD: That's her life, remember.

LEVINE: Well, now, thinking, what are you proudest of that you've done in your life?

KUTI: Oh, well, my husband was a town tax collector in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And then, of course, he worked in Bethlehem Steel. He was a . . .

HARVALD: Inspector.

KUTI: And then he became Justice of the Peace. Fourteen years, he was always elected. At the end I says, "Now, we've had enough of this." So then he resigned. He had to resign, because they wanted to elect him again. And after that we're just senior citizens, lived ever after. And my son, he made so good. He worked for J.C. Penny's and a lot of these big firms.

HARVALD: In New York.

KUTI: And then South Carolina always went higher. Well, now, again, she's the president of a big firm in Chicago, and had seven, eight children. I'm really happy about that. That's why I say I'm always last because I'm happy. (she laughs) God gave me a lot.

LEVINE: Are you enjoying your life now?

KUTI: I do.

LEVINE: What is it that keeps you feeling happy at this stage of your life?

KUTI: I enjoy, I have a little house of my own. The only thing, I miss them. But, you know, my son in Chicago calls me every day, every day. And my grandchildren, in the evening, I'm, like, with them. But I miss them so much. But I think, "This is my life, and I'm not going to aggravate them." They always say, "Come and move here, come and move here." But I don't want to go out of my little house. (she laughs) So when the time comes I guess I know where I'll be, but right now I just want to stay there.

LEVINE: Well, now, thinking back over your life of starting out here and going to Hungary for your formative years, I guess, and coming back, what do you think the Hungarian part of your experience has to do with the person you are, or the life that you've had? What difference has it made to you, I guess?

KUTI: Well, I'll tell you. Hungarian people are very respectful people, and I think they added to America's culture, because they're all very nice people. And I love America. It's the best country in the world. Anything you want to be or do you can do it. And make your life very happy. And I'm just happy to be here in America. I love America. Yes, I do.

HARVALD: Yes, you do. I know you do.

EI-233/KUTI

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe that's a really good place to stop.

KUTI: Okay.

LEVINE: And I want to thank you very much. And this is November 24, 1992, and we're here in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. I've been speaking with Mary Horvath Kuti. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

KUTI: And I'm so happy to meet you.

LEVINE: Thank you. Same here.