

EI-306

ROSE GANBAUM HALPERN

BIRTH DATE: JULY 18, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/28/1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:01:05

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: NORTH MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 10/1994

RUSSIA, 1923

BORN: STANCHA CHESINIFKA, UKRAINE

AGE AT IMMIGRATION: 12

PASSAGE ON: BYRON

PORT: CONSTANTINOPLE

U.S. RESIDENCE: BRONX, NY

Oral Historian's Note: Ms. Halpern is the friend of Murray Chernikoff, Interview EI-305. Ms. Halpern frequently touches her microphone, creating a great deal of extraneous noise throughout the recording of this interview. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 10/25/1994.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's April 28th, 1993, and I'm here with Rose Halpern, who came from Russia in 1923 when she was twelve years old. And also with us is Murray Chernikoff, who also has been interviewed for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Well, I'm very happy to get to talk with you, and I'm glad that I came upon you since I lost your original questionnaire form. So let's begin at the beginning and you tell me your birth date.

HALPERN: My birth date is July 18, 1911.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

HALPERN: I was born in, near Kiev, near Kiev. And the town is named Stancha Chesinifka. Can you write it?

LEVINE: No. (she laughs)

HALPERN: Stancha. So write it anyway.

CHERNIKOFF: Station, station.

HALPERN: Stancha is a station, all right. But in Russia it's Stancha Chesinifka. It's near Kiev.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

HALPERN: What, Stancha?

LEVINE: The last.

HALPERN: Kiev, Kiev. Kiev is K . . .

LEVINE: No, the little town, the station.

HALPERN: Oh, the station? Chesinifka. I don't even know how to spell it.

CHERNIKOFF: I'll write it.

HALPERN: Write it any old way. Chesinifka. C-H . . .

CHERNIKOFF: Like a "hav." C-H . . .

HALPERN: Chesinifka.

CHERNIKOFF: (?) Res - N-I-F-K-A.

LEVINE: Okay.

HALPERN: It was a small town, a small town. But right now I heard, now it became Gorod, I mean, the City of Chesinifka. Because a lot of people have moved quite a lot to this town for the past twenty-five years. This is what my family, my Russian relatives who are now in Russia.

LEVINE: They tell you, they write you.

HALPERN: They told me, yes. They told me. My family, I still have seven nieces and nephews in Moscow, and I have seventeen nieces and nephews in Israel. Four, six nieces and nephews in California.

LEVINE: Well, what do you remember before the town became so big, when you were there as a little girl?

HALPERN: Well, it's a little town. It was a little town in a railroad

station, a railroad station. And I remember it very well.

LEVINE: Good. Tell me everything you can remember.

HALPERN: I remember very well. We were a family, eight children, four boys and four girls. My parents had a grocery store in where we lived. In that apartment, next to the apartment was a big store. That's what my parents were doing. And by, uh, and they used to go shop, where there was flea markets they would go shop there and bring it to the store, you see? And that's how we made a living, the eight children. I wasn't the youngest. I had a younger brother. I was twelve.

LEVINE: Maybe you can tell me the names of your brothers and sisters.

HALPERN: Well, of course. I'll start from the youngest one. Misha was, let's see, when we left, I was twelve. Ten, and eight, okay. Eight years old was Misha. Ten years old was Bennie. I was twelve. No, I wasn't twelve. They were younger. Excuse me, excuse me. I came to this country twelve years old. We traveled for two years, so I was only ten years old.

LEVINE: Oh, when you left.

HALPERN: When I left, ten. Eight and six, and Misha was six, Bennie, Bennie was eight. I was ten years old, okay? And then . . .

LEVINE: And how about the ones . . .

HALPERN: And my sister Tanya was two years older. We were all two years old. So, I was ten, she was twelve. My brother, my brother Max was fourteen. Then my sister Tanya was sixteen. My brother Yasha was eighteen, and my sister Ludya was eight. You've got eight children.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name and her maiden name?

HALPERN: Oh, her maiden name was Chava.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

HALPERN: Chava.

CHERNIKOFF: Chava, Chava.

HALPERN: Chava. C-H-A-V-A. Chava. And her maiden, second name, was Cohen. See, my father's name was Buchach.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

HALPERN: Buchach.

CHERNIKOFF: Bennie.

HALPERN: Bernard, Bennie. No, no. Not Bennie, no, Buchach.
B-U-C-H-A. Buchach. B-U-C-H-A-C-H. Buchach.

LEVINE: And your maiden name?

HALPERN: My maiden name was Ganbaum, Ganbaum.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

HALPERN: G-A-N-B-A-U-M. Ganbaum. That was my maiden name.

LEVINE: Now, did you have grandparents?

HALPERN: Yes, yes, yes. In Russia they warned, in Chesinifka where we lived. But my mother's, my mother's parents lived away, Terlitza, Terlitza. They lived in Terlitza, maybe a couple of hours, maybe about two hundred miles away from the Chesinifka. They lived there, my grandparents.

LEVINE: Did you see them much?

HALPERN: Yes. I'll come to that, darling. I'll come to my grandparents. When I first start you my experience, the first bad, very bad experience was when we had to leave there, Chesinifka, okay? I'll start you with the bad experience, okay? My, I remember it very well. Then we were children and we went to school. I went to school and the older children went to school, too. And that's

all. Some of them worked. My oldest ones worked. I don't know by what, I don't remember. But my brother was getting married. See, my mother didn't want my brother Yasha to marry this woman. She was much older. We didn't have an engagement. There was no engagement. But to the wedding, my mother made up that she made a beautiful wedding for my brother Yasha. And during the wedding we heard, someone came running that a train of the bandits came into our town. So, and they, we heard about the bandits, the pogroms. That was the pogroms. I remember the pogroms like today, and I was so young. They came.

So what did my mother do? She made my sister-in-law, the wedding was over. She made my sister-in-law take off her wedding dress, whatever, and she put on an old dress, and she sent them out with my brother. Let them go and hide themselves! And my both sisters, I think she put them in a cellar, send them in a cellar, because they were and age that she was afraid they shouldn't seduce them, rape them. So she did, she sent them away. And the younger ones, we remained in the house. They did come in, a whole bunch of them. They found the musicians in the apartment.

And the minute they opened the door, "Where is the bride?" They heard it was a wedding. "We want the bride." I says, "We don't know where she is. She left. Go look

for her." They got so angry they took a bunch of eggs and they threw them at my mother's face, because she felt that she was the instigator to send them away, Mother.

They took the three musicians, we heard afterwards, and they hung them, they took them to the train, and they hung them up on the train, the three musicians. This is what I remember. I remember that today. You can't remember what happened last week, but as a kid I remember that bad time. And we, they left, they left. Oh, no. My mother went in, my mother went in. No, that was in Terlitza.

She took a horse and wagon, my mother. We had a horse and wagon. She took us all in the horse and wagon, covered us with straw there, and we were on our way to our grandparents, and it was quite a distance. I can't tell you how many hours it took us, but it was quite a ride there. We came to our grandparents. It was an apartment, and we were a big family. Somehow we all slept on the floor. What happened? My grandparents were delighted that we escaped injuries to ourselves. And naturally we made ourselves at home. And my sister, maybe my older sister was married, oh, yes, yes. She was already in Terlitza. That's where my grandparents lived, Terlitza. I don't know how you spell it, Terlitza.

CHERNIKOFF: T-E-R-L . . .

HALPERN: Terlitza, a town. Also a small, a shtetl. You put on a shtetl. Yeah. And we came there, and we made ourselves at home. A week later we heard that there was more bandits coming in. They called them, (?), (?). I don't know what they called them, these bandits. I think they were all Polish bandits, I don't know. And they came into my grandparents' house. They looked and looked, and they saw a young woman in a bedroom, and I was in that bedroom, the next bed. And I was with my grandfather, and she was, no, no. I was sleeping with someone. I don't remember with whom. My grandfather and his daughter, he had a single daughter. Of course, my mother naturally, one daughter was married, that's with my mother. So what happened?

And they came in, six of them, six bandits came in. They walked into the room, and they started, they chased out my, no, no. My uncle, they put, my uncle was sleeping with her. I was by myself in a little bed. They took my grandpa. They put him next to me, not like today. And they started to rape my aunt. I think she was about thirty years old. They were standing in line. I didn't know what was happening, I thought they were, because she was crying. So I thought they were hitting her. What

do I know about rape at that time? I didn't know. Anyway, six of them were raping her to death, and they left. They didn't hurt anybody else. And they walked, they ran out.

Oh, yeah. My mother heard they are raping my aunt, she, and then my sister, the one who was eighteen years old, Sophie. She went in the back, my mother. She cut her leg, she made a rag from the blood, and she put it between my sister's legs with the blood so they wouldn't rape her.

And they got very angry. Oh, that's when they threw the bunch of eggs at my sister, uh, my mother, that's right.

Because what she did, they shouldn't rape her. She was a beautiful young girl. That's when they did. I thought it was a (?). And they went out, they went out. They walked, they went out. So my mother again started to do, started to think, "What to do now?" She can't stay there any more. So we got into a, again, to a horse and wagon, and we were riding towards the border, the Russian border.

We thought maybe somehow we'd be able to cross the border to Roumania. We wanted to go to Bucha in Roumania. That was the nearest, from the town where we were, to cross the border, the Russian border, and we would land on the Roumanian side. (a bell rings) What happens, my sister Tanya started to go across, but not through a path, they crossed. This is the Tanya that lives here. They caught

her, they arrested her. And they questioned her, "What are you doing by yourself?" "I'm an orphan." So my mother, well, we all crossed. She was caught. And then we have someone, a contraband, what would you call a contraband? We paid him to take us across the border. Yes, we went. But I don't know why my sister went herself. My mother told her, "Go, you'll be safe." And we crossed, and we all landed on the Roumanian side. And they all put us, about fifty people, we all paid him, we all paid. Everybody paid this guy. After we, before we crossed I remember we were going up to the knee in mud. I remember my father carried one youngster, he was five, six years old, my brother. Carried him on his back. And we crossed, we finally crossed the border in, the mud up to your knees. And you came to the Roumanian side, so we were safe. And we got into a room I think about half this size, about fifty people. And we were there, I think, overnight. And there we were, there we entered the Roumania, the Roumanian border. Now, my sister, my mother knew what jail she was, and she went to see her. And they recog-, they said, "This is, you're not an orphan. This is your mother!" And she started to cry, my sister Tanya, and they let her out, they let her out. The reason was, "I felt I was an orphan because this is what I felt like at

that time, because I didn't want to involve my mother."

Okay, they let her out. They didn't do nothing to my sister. And we joined all together. And in Roumania, we stayed in Roumania, in Bucharest, in Bucharest, for two years until we got our visas. First my aunt and uncle, that was my father's sister and brother-in-law of my father's. There they want to send us visas. But before we receive the visa, she sent one visa, first to my brother Max. He was fourteen years old or so and they wanted, the uncle wanted him to come first, he wanted him to work for him, see how it is. So my brother Max went to America first. So he was settled in America. Then next, who came next? Then we, oh. My brother and sister remained. They were already married. My sister and my brother were married. Yasha and Ludya were married, and they waited and waited, and they thought they'll never be able to come to America. And they heard that there's no more pogroms.

It's kind of peaceful now in Russia. That was in 19, uh '21, yes. It became peaceful there and there were no more pogroms. So they settled in Russia. So they remained in Russia. My sister and her husband went to Terlitza, the town where my grandparents lived. Yasha and his two daughters were in Moscow. That's where my brother lived, my oldest brother, in Moscow, and they remained there.

And they were never able to leave Russia. My brother Yasha, we went there in 1958 when Russia lifted the Iron Curtain. My husband and I decided, when I heard that Russia lifted the Iron Curtain I went to an agency the next day to go to Russia, and my husband approved of that, to go to Russia. And my sister Tanya and her husband, her husband was Russian, too. He came from Kiev, from Kiev, I think, yes. And he had a brother there. My brother-in-law had a brother in Russia somewhere near Kiev. And so the four of us arranged to go and see the family in Russia, and we made the trip. And we got to Russia, my family came and my sister came from Toshkent, you know, the Second World War they wouldn't, they didn't want people to be in the big cities because Hitler was invading the big cities. He was near Moscow. So my sister decided, oh, yeah. So my sister and the whole family went to Toshkent. You heard of Toshkent? And my sister and her family, my sister has three, four, two sons. And she went to Toshkent with her two sons. No, she was remarried already, my sister was remarried and she had four sons. She remarried in Moscow, because her husband was killed. He was going out to a shop in a free market. And they had two kids, and they, oh, they took him and they killed him. My sister remained a widow very young.

LEVINE: When was this?

HALPERN: That was in 1925, 1925. And he over, they were, they killed her husband. So my brother Yasha came from Toshkent, and he took my sister with her two boys, young, two young boys. He took her to Moscow and they settled in Moscow, my sister Ludya. And she remarried, and they had two more sons. So they had four sons. My sister had four sons. And they lived in Moscow all their years until the Second World War when they went to Toshkent, my sister and two sons. And my brother, my nephew, my oldest nephew went into the Russian Army, and he came back minus a leg, so that was tragic. So when I went there in 1958 I met the whole family. Yes, I met the whole family. But I couldn't see my brother. When they all came from Toshkent to greet us, and I didn't see my brother Yasha. So I started to cry, "Where is Yasha?" At the airport, and they all come with flowers, and they're all so happy. A reunion. After, I was there 1958. We parted in 19, eh, '21. Right, '21, two years ago, in Bucharest. So how many years was that, from '21 to '58?

LEVINE: Thirty-seven.

HALPERN: Thirty-seven, right. So it was a terrible, terrible time

going, being in Russia. We found out that my sister, I started to cry. "He's sick. You'll see him, you'll see him. He's very sick now." That was on the way from the airport going to the hotel. And when they came into the hotel my sister sat down and she told us, she told Tanya and myself, my sister Ludja says, "Your brother is in jail.

He was arrested and I don't think you'll be able to see him. Maybe we'll try somehow." And we, and one of my nephews arranged to see a lawyer there. So he arranged to see someone, to be able to see my brother. No one can see anyone in Russia until he is, until he is sentenced, right. Not a mother, not a child. No one can see him until he's sentenced, until his judgement. But we had hopes of speaking to a lawyer in Russia, and we spoke to a district attorney there. He's the one who tried Powell.

Remember we had an American flier who landed in Russia? He was arrested. This district attorney was his lawyer, whatever. And we sat down, and I started to cry and beg him, "Please let me see him for five minutes. He knows we are in America, uh, Russia because we were corresponding, and how is it going to be that we came such a long distance from America to get together with the family, see my brother and the rest of the family, and we can't see him." All he says, all he said, "I'm very

sorry." He says, "No one can see him. Your family, your sister-in-law, your nieces, had business to write to you that you will not be able to see him until he's been sentenced. They know the rule, our Russian rules." And he just wouldn't listen. He says to us, "We don't know when. You'll find out when he'll be sentenced. Maybe you'll come again, he wouldn't have a long jail sentence."

I says, "Well, we can't see him, we're going to go just now. We're going to go back to America. That's all. We can't see him." And I cried my eyes out, my sister and I. And my husband was saying he felt so bad that he thought he was going to meet my brother. Well, he met the rest of the family. I had a big family there, a big family. My sister had four sons when she remarried. My brother had two daughters who were married already when we got, when we went there in 1958. So we had to go back.

Then he says to me, "I heard very bad rumors in your country that you hang colored people, you kill people."

I said, "You just hear bad stories. We don't kill, we don't kill nobody." And I didn't want to discuss with him. I didn't want him to ask me questions about America.

I was interested to see my brother. And we walked out.

We came back to the hotel and my sister-in-law, my sister was there, she came from Toshkent to spend the time with

us. And my sister-in-law said to, my brother's wife, her name was Frieda. She says to us, to my sister and I, and to my husband, "If . . ." You understand Yiddish?

LEVINE: No.

HALPERN: No. "Listen to me, my children. You wouldn't see your brother. And I see you're going to cry, you're going to suffer if you stay any longer. Do me a favor. Pack up and go back. I understand you're going to make stops in Europe." I said, "Yes, we have itineraries to stop in different countries in Europe. We're going to be in Paris and Switzerland, Italy. We're going to travel after we're going to see our family, we'll be so happy, so we decided we're going to spend time in Europe and have a wonderful time." She says, "Well, let's hope to God that he'll be able, he wouldn't be sentenced to (?)." So I said to her, "Frieda, but why was he sentenced?" She says, "He worked in a second-hand store where they sell second-hand merchandise. And, you know, the time was very bad, very bad. So what they did, about forty people got together, forty workers got together, and instead of people would pay five rubles for an article, they report three rubles and put two rubles in their pocket, and then all the guys would divide that." So my sister was telling me. So

somebody squealed on these people, probably a goy or someone squealed because they were living it up, these people that had the extra rubles. And they came during the night, and they arrested my brother. And they said, "You cannot stay in this apartment," to my sister-in-law. We have to lock up this apartment. You can't stay here. Excuse me. So she went to one of her, to one of her children. The two daughters lived in Moscow. She went to live with them. And this was, this was what happened. We packed up, and we went to Europe. And a good time we didn't have in Europe after not seeing my brother. No, a good time we couldn't have.

LEVINE: Can we back up a minute?

HALPERN: Yes, dear.

LEVINE: To, um, to, in your life before the wedding of your sister, and before you . . .

HALPERN: My brother, yes.

LEVINE: And before you left in the wagon.

HALPERN: Yes.

LEVINE: Under the straw. What do you remember about your early

years there?

HALPERN: Well, it was nice. It was very nice. We didn't, we lived like peasants. I don't remember seeing a movie. I don't remember going to a theater. It was a shtetl. There was nothing there.

LEVINE: Do you remember, like, the house?

HALPERN: The house?

LEVINE: What it was like?

HALPERN: It was a small house, a very small house. And, in fact, before we were going to Russia my brother thought, you know, when people come from America they want to see where they were born. So my brother took a train, my brother Yasha, before he was arrested he went to, because we corresponded for a couple of months before we were able to get, to go to Russia, to get permission to go. So he went to Chesinifka. He said he traveled by train, he says about a day, about two days, back and forth, to see the place where we lived. So when we came, he didn't have chance to write it, when we came to Russia my family told us that he couldn't find it, he couldn't find the house. He couldn't find anything. He wanted to save us a job

to travel around to go see where we lived. So he, so this is what he did.

LEVINE: What did you . . .

HALPERN: And I don't re, I don't know. We were playing. First we lived in a little, in a little dorf. A dorf means a little bit of a town. I don't know how many people, a couple of hundred people lived there. And then we moved to this railroad station, supposed to be a little bit better. But I don't remember the dorf, the other little town where we lived. That I don't remember. We were kids. But in Chesinifka I remember. I was eight, ten years old already, remember that we had a nice apartment. I don't know, we had a little house. A little house. And I don't remember any hardships. I don't remember. I don't remember any hardships. We had enough food. We were dressed nice. All summer, the minute the weather became nice and warm we were barefoot. We were barefoot running around. We had trees. We had fruit trees. We would go out and pick the fruit.

LEVINE: What kind of fruit? Do you remember?

HALPERN: All kinds. Apples, plums, I remember. All kinds of fruit we planted there. And we had a garden, a beautiful garden,

and we had vegetable gardens there, and the rest of the food we used to buy. We had a grocery. So I remember it wasn't too bad. It wasn't too bad.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to school?

HALPERN: I don't remember going to school. I don't remember. Isn't that something? I don't remember attending classes.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Were your clothes made by your mother or by someone else?

HALPERN: No, we had somebody who made the clothes for us there.

You couldn't, there was no, I don't remember clothes for us there. There was no, I don't remember a clothes store, for children or adults. It was terrible. (she laughs)

It was so ancient, my God, my goodness. It was really something. Nothing, no theater, no movies, no, I don't remember anything.

LEVINE: Were you religious? Was your family religious?

HALPERN: My, oh, yes, very religious. My father, my grandparents were very religious.

LEVINE: What did they, how did they observe? What did they do?

HALPERN: Where, in Russia? Oh, they were, they had a little synagogue. They were in there. And my father came, my father came, and I'll tell you about a little sad, another sad story. Coming, I said, coming to America, I should have mentioned before coming to America we were all, my brother Max came first. My uncle sent for him. Then the four, the six children, five remained with my parents, right, to come together, we had the visas to go to America. My two, my sister and brother remained in Russia, naturally. My younger, and my brother Max came to America himself, so we remained five, six. Yes, five. And we were, we received our visas, and we were ready to leave with my parents. My sister Tanya, the one who lives right here, she took sick, and my mother remained with her, so we had to leave them in Bucharest. We had to leave them in Bucharest. And so we left, we couldn't remain. We had with the visas. So they just crossed over when we came to there we crossed over that my mother, my sister couldn't, weren't able to join us, my sister took very sick. She had pneumonia. Or she had, no, TB, excuse me. She developed TB. And I was ten, she was twelve years old. So we left. We came to the United States. And we used to correspond, my mother would write to us that Tanya

is better, and hope to God we'll be able to join you. We received a letter from my sister a couple of months later that mother died in Bucharest. And my sister Tanya remained alone. So she had bad memories. If she's coming you'll speak to this young lady from the HIAS. I asked her to come up. She didn't want to. She has very bad memories. She had bad tragedy here in America, in her life.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, how did you go from Bucharest? Where did you leave from?

HALPERN: From Bucharest? We came here.

LEVINE: No, I mean, what port did you take your ship from?

HALPERN: Oh, which port. Uh, ooh, I told you, uh, oh, God, I knew it. What port was it? (Mr. Chernikoff whispers in the background.)

LEVINE: Do you remember how you went? Did you take a train?

HALPERN: We took Constantinople. Constantinople. The port in Constantinople. Constantinople. And we took a ship there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HALPERN: We took a ship there.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Bucharest to go there?

HALPERN: Yes, yes. How we went to Constantinople I don't remember, I don't remember. We got to Constantinople. We took the ship there.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

HALPERN: Yes, Cunard Line, the ship Byron.

LEVINE: Byron.

HALPERN: Byron, Cunard Line.

LEVINE: Did you get examined before?

HALPERN: Before? No, I don't remember getting examined, no. We took the ship. There was my father, and the five of us.

LEVINE: Do you remember the voyage?

HALPERN: Oh! The voyage, unbelievable. That was an unbelievable, we traveled a whole month. A whole month we traveled on this boat. It was awful. Everybody was stretched out. Everybody was sick, everybody. Nobody was able to eat. There was no food on the boat. We had three times a day sardines. When I came to this country until a couple of years ago I couldn't touch a sardine. Everybody was very,

very sick, very sick, throwing up. Everybody stretched out on deck, all over. We didn't think we'd be able to reach the United States. That's how bad it was. Like a steerage, what do you call this boat?

LEVINE: You were down in the hold of the boat.

HALPERN: Down, sure, down. On deck it was, it was awful. Okay. We came back, thank God.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

HALPERN: Oh, yes, of course, sure. We came in. My aunt and uncle met us. They're the ones . . .

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

HALPERN: In Ellis Island. My aunt, that's my father's sister and her husband.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island? Could you talk about what you remember about Ellis Island?

HALPERN: Not too much, dear, not too much. I knew there were a lot of people, a lot of people surrounding us. And then I think we had to go through examinations, health. We had to be examined. That I remember that. We had to stay in line. I remember, yeah. And I remember my aunt and

uncle said, "My God, we're here so, we're here already about six, seven, eight hours. What's taking so long?"

We don't know. I remember my father talked to my aunt and uncle. No, there's a lot of people here. Hundreds of people came in at the same time. Different ships came in at the same time. Or maybe from the morning that people came, and then we came in, our ship. And, well, it was bad, it was bad. Coming into this country was bad. There was no help, there was no welfare. No one helped you here in America. In 1923? You couldn't get help from anyone.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Ellis Island with your aunt and uncle?

HALPERN: Yes.

LEVINE: And then where did you go?

HALPERN: We went to their house. They took us to their house.

LEVINE: Where was that?

HALPERN: And we stayed, in the Bronx.

LEVINE: Did you . . .

HALPERN: Eastern Avenue. What, dear?

LEVINE: Do you remember how you got there?

HALPERN: To where? To, from Ellis Island? I think we took the train. A train. We all got into the train, right.

LEVINE: And where did you stay it was?

HALPERN: Eastern Avenue in the Bronx, near 180th Street, right near Bronx Park. And we stayed with my aunt and uncle for a couple of weeks, and then we got an apartment near my aunt and uncle, on the same block, on Eastern Avenue.

LEVINE: And then did you start into school?

HALPERN: Yes. I started to go to school, and my younger two brothers went to school with me. We went together. And I had to be the homemaker, the house woman. Because my mother wasn't with us. I was the youngest, and my older, my two older sisters had to go to work. Then my sister came herself, Tanya, two years later, and when she came she went to work.

LEVINE: What do you remember about school when you first started, and not knowing the language?

HALPERN: It was bad, it was very bad. It was very bad. They put us in a class. It was very bad. I says, you know, day

school, it was bad. And my two younger brothers went with me. It was bad. But I guess young people learn fast because you hear the language around you. So I think we learned fast going to day school. It was fast, fast learning English.

LEVINE: And how about your father. What did he do when you first came?

HALPERN: Well, my uncle was in the banana business. And my brother worked for him, my brother Max worked for my uncle, because he brought him, the first born, okay. And my, guess what my father did. They gave him bananas, a couple of hands of bananas, and they gave him a stand near a fruit store. And he had outside a little stand, and he would sell bananas. That's what he was making a living from, my father. So we couldn't go to high school, much education. I finished elementary school and that's about it. I had to go to work. My father wasn't able to buy me a pair of shoes. So my sisters worked, my brother Max worked, and my two younger brothers were with me, going to school. And I had to shop. They called me, in my building, I'll never forget it. Every time I walked out they would go, "There goes little Mamala." Because I was their homemaker, I was the whole housekeeper. Don't forget, I had to cook

and clean for five and Papa, six people. No, six, seven people. There were six children here now. Sure, we were six started to live, come to live with us. We were six children, and Papa was seven. So I had to shop, because they all worked except my two brothers were with me. It was difficult, it was difficult. But finally I was about seventeen, eighteen, seventeen years old, eighteen years old. A woman came to see my father from the same town where my father came from. And she came with her son.

Her husband died or something, and they, Papa, someone suggested they should get married. She was alone, Papa was alone, they should get married. And she was a nice woman. She was from Terlitza, right, where my mother lived. She knew my mother. And they got married, and I was delighted. I liked her. She took a burden off my hands. God, wow, it was a pleasure. I opened my eyes.

I didn't have to do any work. And he was happy with her, and I think they lived about ten years. Then Papa passed away. And she had one son. He got married, and then when my father died she went to live with her son. She lived, and we were in touch, and she died, too.

LEVINE: Did you work after your father married?

HALPERN: Oh, yes, sure, sure. I went to work. I worked at a factory

where they manufacture embroidery. And it was a friend of one of the family came to ride with us on the ship and became very good friends. And this family had relatives in America, and this man had a factory, an embroidery factory.

LEVINE: In the Bronx?

HALPERN: In the Bronx, sure. I only lived in the Bronx. I didn't live anywhere else. I came to the Bronx in 1923 and I lived there until my husband died in 1970, I lived in the Bronx. Okay, I don't want to go back. Anyway . . .

LEVINE: So when did you meet your husband?

HALPERN: Oh, I went to work in this place. In fact, he taught me how to use the machine, and I had a steady job. Because it used to get slow in the Bronx, in the factories. You know, there used to be slack time. But I was steady. He never sent me away. I was there all year around making a salary. So it was very, very nice. Then I met my husband. I took a walk in Bronx Park with a friend of mine. It was fourth of July and the two of us took a walk to Bronx Park, Katonah Park. I wasn't far from Katonah Park, and we took a walk where I lived. And there was my husband sitting there on the grass there in the park with four

more young men. And we passed by, and they started to flirt with us, and they called us to come and join them.

So I wasn't bashful. I wasn't afraid. I saw the nice looking five guys, they're staying there. So my friend was a little reluctant. I said, "Oh, come on, Clara. Don't worry. They're not going to kill us. Let's go and join them. Let's talk to them." So we walked over and we started to converse. And the reason they were there, my husband lost his, his mother died or his father. He was sitting shiva. He got up after a week sitting shiva.

It was on a Friday, so the friend and a brother took him out, take a walk after they were sitting, after seven days of mourning. So we got to know each other, and my husband wanted the phone number, naturally, to call me. I said, "Well, I'm going away for a little," I didn't want to give him the phone number. I said, "I'm going away, but I'll write to you. Give me your address, give me your phone number. And that's what I did. I took his address, and I think I, I did go somewhere. I don't know. I dropped him a card, and I gave him the phone number on my card, and he called me up, and we started to go out. And that's how we got together. That's how we met. And we were married thirty-six years. I have two sons.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

HALPERN: Hymie, Hymie.

LEVINE: And do you remember what you liked about him?

HALPERN: Oh, he was handsome. I'll show you the picture there.

He was handsome, good looking, built nice, and very ambitious guy, very ambitious, very ambitious. He did very well.

LEVINE: What did he do?

HALPERN: First he was in the plumbing line. He worked in a factory, he told me afterwards, ladies belts. So a man came in there to fix a pipe, plumbing. So the plumber came over to a man. He says, "Hey, this is a sissy job working on ladies belts. Come see my boss, you'll be great in the plumbing line." So he went to see his boss in the plumbing line, he liked him. And he said, "I'll teach you." So the guy that spoke to him, this guy that spoke to him, he's going to license you, he's going to teach you about the plumbing line. So that's how it happened. He was learning the plumbing line, he did very nice. He went, he got his license, plumbing license, and he went in business on his own, a plumbing business in Harlem.

LEVINE: And how about your children? What are their names?

HALPERN: The name is David and Allen.

LEVINE: Allen?

HALPERN: Allen, David and Allen. And my Allen is named after my uncle who brought us to this country. My aunt came because her children weren't married yet, the daughters. So she came to the house and says, "Look, I don't know when my children, when I'll be a grandma, when they'll have children? In the meantime, I like you to name him after Uncle. He did so much for all you family." I named him, Abram was his name, and I named him Allen Leah. My Allen is named after an uncle that brought us to this country, Murray. His name was Abram, and I named both, both names, Allen Leah. Yes.

LEVINE: And you have grandchildren?

HALPERN: Yes. I have five. Five grandchildren. Four granddaughters and one grandson. And they all live in New York. They all live up, in New York, in Westchester, or in Connecticut or Jersey. I have three, four granddaughters. One is, one granddaughter, she just lost her grandfather in New York so she called me the other

day. That she wants me, I think I told you, she wants me to sit down, she has a video, a video. She wants me to sit down and talk into the video about my experience, because she heard what a bad, bad time I had when I was a little girl. You know, what do the young children here know? They live very well. They have everything. All my boys, and we make a long trip, I would go through my experience. So my granddaughter Jill was a teacher, and she caught me one day, one Passover. I spent the Passover holiday with my children. And she says, "I know you refused my father. You always wanted to tape, you should sit down and tape your experience. And you always refused him, and I don't know why, Grandma. But you can't refuse me. I'm your granddaughter. I'm a teacher. I want your experience, and I'm going to play, I'm going to play it for my students and all my teachers that I know."

LEVINE: What would you say is the impact on you of having come through everything you did from the time you were a young girl and coming to this country?

HALPERN: The impact was a very bad impact to go to, to go to work when you're young, not to get more of an education, and to, when I was twelve years old I lost my mother. That was an impact on my life. Then I loved my father very

much, very much. Papa was very religious, and I kept a kosher home. And when Papa passed away I had already, my kids were only little boys when Papa died. He died in 19, uh, he was sixty-two, sixty-four years old when he died in 1941. So I was, I loved my father very, very much, and he loved me because I took care of him for many years, you know. And he was so happy the way I took care of the two little boys, so I was very close with Papa.

When he passed away I was angry at the whole world. I don't know. Maybe because I wasn't close with Mama. I left her, I was a kid. I was ten years old when I left Mama. I don't remember. She was always a businesswoman.

So it was devastating for me, devastating. I came into the house after the funeral and I took, "If my Papa can't come and have dinner here, have a cup of tea in my house, I don't want a kosher home." I started to take all the dishes and I mixed them all up, and I never kept a kosher home again. My husband didn't care. He wasn't that religious. And, so it was devastating. Oh, God. It was very, very bad. And my sister Tanya, my two sisters of mine were married, got married here. One sister Sophie had three children, and one son seventeen years old, he went to Yeshiva, finished with the highest mark, Yeshiva, and they had a summer home. He went to the lake and a

young girl, his girlfriend, they went to the lake, she threw in a tire from a car and she dared him to jump through the tire. He jumped through the tire and he remained, he became paralyzed, and they had to take him out, and he died within a week. That was my sister Sophie's older son. He was seventeen years old. That was tragedy, a tragedy in my house. First son, it took her many years until she became pregnant. That's one tragedy, big tragedy, big tragedy.

LEVINE: What do you think were the happiest times that you remember in your life?

HALPERN: In America?

LEVINE: Or Russia, either one.

HALPERN: In Russia I can't remember anything. Nothing happy. We were running.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

HALPERN: As long as I can remember we were running away from pogroms. And here in America I had a good life after I met my husband. We had a good life. We made very ambitious man, he gave up the plumbing, he went into real estate with two brothers, my brother-in-law, and they did very, very

well.

LEVINE: Was he also from Russia, your husband?

HALPERN: Poland.

LEVINE: Poland.

HALPERN: Poland, Poland, Poland. So we had a nice life, comfortable, and my two boys finished college. David finished Fordham University as a pharmacist, but he didn't practice, and he didn't care for pharmacy. He joined his father in the real estate business. And my son Allen finished the University of Miami, and he majored in accountancy. And he didn't go, advance in accountancy. He liked real estate, so he married a young lady he met at the University of Miami. The wedding was in Florida, and he had a little child. And my husband said to him, because his parents died when they weren't married, the three boys, they weren't married, so there was no grandchild and, for his parents. So when the children were going out, leaving on their honeymoon he said, "Don't forget, nine months later I'll come back to Florida. I want to be a grandfather." They obliged him. So we had three daughters and Allen, and they got married a couple of years later, yeah. And then my sister Tanya lost a

daughter who had two children, so she has very, her oldest daughter Evelyn. She passed away.

LEVINE: Do you feel that you have a part of you or a side of you that is Russian?

HALPERN: Yes, yes. Definitely, definitely. As young as I was.

I love my music, he does, too. I don't know why you're saying it's not a part of you. I'm here, my life has been here. But I still have a little bit of that feeling of Russia. Not that I have good memories, but I still love the music. We love the Yiddish (?). I love the Russian records. I have a bunch of Russian records. There, when I was in Russia, my family, I was five times in Russia, dear. I was five times in Russia. When my son, we're going to go back now. My sister wrote to us. He was sentenced, she didn't want to say Yasha was sentenced eight years, but she said, "The baby was eight years old yesterday." So we knew. You know, it was afraid at that time, 1958. Russia was awful at that time. So we knew he was sentenced eight years. Eight years we were back, we were back in Russia. But my husband couldn't go away. He was involved with things. So he says, "Take your both sisters, Sophie and Tanya, and go." And Tanya had lost her husband, so she went. And my sister Sophie had lost

her husband, so, and my sister Sophie was never there before, so the three of us went to Russia. And naturally my brother was at the airport. And he came over, the first one he came to me. I think I told you. He came over to me, and he says, "Oy, my Yiddish. My little sister." I said, "Yasha, I'm not any more your little sister. I am a grandma, I am a Bubba." He says, "In my eyes you're still my baby sister." And we both cried, cried like never before to see each other, and that he was released. And it was, it was a joy, it was a joy. And then we went again a few more times. My sister would write to us. She's marrying off some grandchildren, a grandchild or something. I was ready to go. I used to go, my sister Tanya would go with me, twice again. And the last time that I was there, we went to three weddings, nieces' weddings.

LEVINE: What were the weddings like?

HALPERN: Beautiful. Beautiful, darling. They were music, a beautiful band. We all danced, a couple of hundred people, because the whole town was invited. It was in all the weddings. All the three weddings were in Toshkent. (she shows photograph) See, one of my nieces that we, that lived in Moscow, the groom lived in Toshkent. She met

him while she was in Tashkent. So the weddings were all arranged in Tashkent, and my oldest nephew, my sister's son, the oldest nephew worked in a store in Tashkent. I think a food, like a department store, and he was in the food department. So, excuse me dear. So he was able to get all the food and he brought it to the place, to the catering place, it was. And he took a couple of women and they cooked all the food. So there was plentiful food, all the drinks. And it was a beautiful, beautiful. It was beautiful. Then I went to that wedding that my brother Yasha was there, naturally. So it was a big thing, it was a beautiful, beautiful reunion, a beautiful reunion. And I was there with my both sisters, so it was nice. It was very, very nice. And then again my sister would marry off another granddaughter. She would write to us, "Come, please shine up my granddaughter's, my (?) wedding. You must come." So I picked myself up and go. I went with my sister. Now, the last time, the last was 1983, and my sister took sick. My sister, my sister Sophie had passed away. She couldn't go. And Tanya took sick, so she couldn't join me. And I wanted to go again to a wedding in 1993. So I called up, my granddaughter Elysa was graduating college, Tufts University. So I called her up in April, in March. In April was the wedding. I said,

"Elysa," I was in Florida, "I said, Elysala, I picked out a nice gift for your graduation." So she says, "Oh, Grandma, don't bother with a gift. All I want is you to come to my graduation. I don't need anything." I says, "What I have picked for you, you're going to love it. How would you like to go to a wedding? You'll meet all your cousins and aunts and uncles in Russia." Well, she started to scream over the phone. I think my sister and my family heard her in Russia. "You really mean it?" I says, "Would I kid you? To go to Russia and meet your, the first time in your life, to meet all your cousins and my sister." My brother was already gone, he was passed away. And then I called my brother, my son David. He was never in Russia. I said, "David, Tanya's not well, she cannot join me. I'd like you to join me once now. You couldn't join me the previous trips, but now I think you ought to join me. It's a wedding. You'll meet, finally you'll meet all your cousins, you'll meet my sister." He says, "I'll call you back, Mother. I'll see if I can get away." He was on business. So he called me a couple of days later. He says, "Okay, mother. I'll join you."

LEVINE: Wonderful.

HALPERN: So I had my son and my granddaughter joined me to Russia. We had a wonderful time. And that was the last time. I'm not going there any more, no more. I have my nieces and nephews now, but they don't want to go to Israel. They want to come to America.

LEVINE: Okay. I think we have to stop here. The tape is running out. I want to thank you very much.

HALPERN: Oh, good, good.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Rose Halpern, and it's April 28th, 1993 and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Thank you very much.

HALPERN: You're very welcome, very. Some sad and some happy conversation. It was very nice. In fact, my granddaughter taped all this here, that I spoke with you, my granddaughter, yes.

LEVINE: Thank you.

HALPERN: Okay. Now you're going to, it's twenty after one. I think I'll go, I went to gym this morning. I think I'll, is it warm enough to go to the pool, Murray?

CHERNIKOFF: I don't know.

LEVINE: I want to ask you to sign . . .

HALPERN: Murray, did you hear all, I don't know if you knew all my life history?

CHERNIKOFF: I know part of it.

HALPERN: Huh? You knew part of it, but not all like I spoke today, did you?

CHERNIKOFF: I heard just about everything you said here.

LEVINE: Okay. You can read this. It just says we can put the tape in the library at Ellis Island.

CHERNIKOFF: The same thing I signed, right?

LEVINE: Yes.

HALPERN: I get a copy? Will I get a copy? (tape ends)