

EI-034

ANNA (CHANA LYA) HEYMAN TENZER

BIRTH DATE: FEBRUARY 18, 1902

INTERVIEW DATE: 3/27/1991

RUNNING TIME: 35:30

INTERVIEWER: CARLO SCISSURA

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1/1994

POLAND, 1912

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON "THE NOORDAM"

SCISSURA: This is Carlos Scissura for the National Park Service. It's Wednesday, March 27, 1991, and I'm here with Mrs. Tenzer, who came from Poland in 1912 at the age of ten. Good afternoon, Mrs. Tenzer.

TENZER: Good afternoon.

SCISSURA: Can you state your full name, including your maiden name?

TENZER: My full name is, do you want the Jewish name?

SCISSURA: Yeah, please.

TENZER: Chana Lya Heyman, H-E-Y-M-A-N.

SCISSURA: Okay. And can you spell the first name also?

TENZER: C-H-A-N-A.

SCISSURA: And the middle name?

TENZER: I believe it's L-Y-A. Heyman, and the last name is H-E-Y-M-A-N.

SCISSURA: Okay. And your name now is . . .

TENZER: My name now is Anna Tenzer, T-E-N-Z-E-R.

SCISSURA: Okay. And you came from Poland, am I correct?

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: Okay.

TENZER: In the area of Warsaw a small town, a manufacturing town, where they used to manufacture, German factories made linens there.

SCISSURA: And what is your date of birth?

TENZER: February 18, 1902.

SCISSURA: Okay. And what was the name of the town you were born in?

TENZER: Zyrardow.

SCISSURA: Can you spell that for me?

TENZER: (she laughs) The best way I think I can spell it is Z-Y-R-A-R-D-O-W.

SCISSURA: Okay. And . . .

TENZER: It may not be correct, but . . .

SCISSURA: That's close enough. That will be fine.

TENZER: Yeah, but that's the name of the place.

SCISSURA: Okay. And it was right outside of Warsaw, you said?
Right outside of Warsaw?

TENZER: I don't exactly know how far away it was, but it's in that vicinity.

SCISSURA: Okay. And you were born and raised there?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what the town was like?

TENZER: Typical Jewish town except for the factories there. They had a public school, but Jewish children were not allowed

to go there. I had a private tutor who taught me Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew, how to read and write in Hebrew and how to write in Polish.

SCISSURA: And what were your parents' names?

TENZER: My father's name was Samuel Heyman. My mother's name? Yoheyat, Yoheyat Heyman.

SCISSURA: Yoheyat. Can you spell that?

TENZER: Y-O-H-E, H-E-, Y-A-T, I believe.

SCISSURA: Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about what your father did for a living?

TENZER: He had a shoe store, selling shoes. At the beginning it was second-hand shoes. Later on it developed into a better business, new shoes, family stores, family type of store.

SCISSURA: And did your mother work also, or was she just at home?

TENZER: No, my mother was a housewife, but she used to stay with my father in the store.

SCISSURA: Okay. And did you have any brothers and sisters?

TENZER: Yes. I had a brother when we came at the age of six,

and my sister was about eighteen months old.

SCISSURA: Okay. And what was your brother's name?

TENZER: My brother's name was Harry Heyman.

SCISSURA: Okay. And your sister?

TENZER: My sister's name was Molly.

SCISSURA: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the house that you grew up in in Poland?

TENZER: Well, it wasn't anything like what I've seen on the screen. It was a nice brick building in sort of a courtyard. A lot of people living, I think it was two stories, the lower and the upper story. I remember at one time there was a commotion outside, and we were always afraid of pogroms.

SCISSURA: What are pogroms?

TENZER: What they are?

SCISSURA: Yeah.

TENZER: Well, that's when the, uh, either the police or the Polish people would run through the streets. They caused damage to Jewish people.

SCISSURA: So it was tough being Jewish in that town.

TENZER: It was very hard.

SCISSURA: It was very hard. Were there a lot of Jewish people living there?

TENZER: Yes. In our town there were a lot of people. It was about as many Jewish people there as there were Christians.

SCISSURA: Oh, were there? Okay.

TENZER: Because it was a manufacturing town there were a lot of Christian people working in the factories, but no Jewish people could work there. Jewish children could not go to a public school. They had to have private tutoring.

SCISSURA: And did all the Jewish people live in one area of the town, or were they spread apart?

TENZER: No, they were scattered around, but it was mostly an area where they did live.

SCISSURA: And did you have a synagogue that you went to?

TENZER: Of course.

SCISSURA: Can you tell me a little bit about your religious life when you were a child in Poland?

TENZER: Well, as much as I can remember, being a child. Holidays mostly. Saturdays, any holiday on the Sabbath everybody went to the temple. And it was strictly religious, not like we find conditions here in this country where there are so many denominations, you know. Over there everybody observed a strictly religious way of living.

SCISSURA: So religion was a very important part of everybody's life.

TENZER: Right, right.

SCISSURA: Okay. And you said the tutor, you had a tutor at home.

TENZER: I had a private tutor who taught me how to read and write Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish.

SCISSURA: Okay. And you weren't allowed to go to the public school. You were not allowed to go to the public school?

TENZER: No. They wouldn't accept any Jewish children. It was a private school, like, only for Christian children.

SCISSURA: And did this private tutor teach you about the Jewish religion also?

TENZER: Well, yes. She taught me Hebrew, and that's where I learned about the religion.

SCISSURA: Okay. Great. And what did you do in the town for a social life? Was there anything to do other than working and going to school?

TENZER: It was not the way we understand things in this country. There's no such thing. Holidays were celebrated. That was always joyous times, and get-togethers of families. Otherwise it was just inter-family meetings and spending time together.

SCISSURA: Right. Did you have a big family in the town?

TENZER: A big family?

SCISSURA: Yeah, aunts or uncles?

TENZER: Yes. I had an aunt with about seven children, and my mother's uncle, who had grown children. That's the extent of it.

SCISSURA: And would you say that, did you live well in Poland?

TENZER: Did we live well?

SCISSURA: Yeah. Were there ever times when money was tight,

or . . .

TENZER: Well, it was hard making a living. That's the reason for my father's leaving there and coming here. He arrived in this country about two years before we did.

SCISSURA: Okay. So he came before you came.

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: He came in 1910? In 1910? Did he come in 1910?

TENZER: I don't understand what you mean.

SCISSURA: 1910?

TENZER: About, oh, you mean the year when he came.

SCISSURA: Yeah, the year.

TENZER: Yes, about two years before us, right.

SCISSURA: And he came by himself?

TENZER: He came by himself, and once he was established here he sent for us.

SCISSURA: Okay. And what did he do when he came here?

TENZER: Well, at first he was a shoemaker. That was his

trade in Europe. But when he came to this country, instead of going into making shoes and repairing shoes he got into the business of opening a shoe store, and that's what he had.

SCISSURA: In New York?

TENZER: In New York, yes. In Manhattan.

SCISSURA: In Manhattan, okay.

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: So did he have to save up money in Poland to come here?

TENZER: Well, the family helped out. We had an uncle over here who actually saw to it that he would come.

SCISSURA: Oh, so you had just one uncle here, then?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: And he helped him to come, then.

TENZER: That's right.

SCISSURA: Did you have any other relatives here, or was it just the uncle?

TENZER: Well, there were a lot of people that we knew from

the city that we lived in, but at that time, at those times most people were brought here by somebody who was already here. And they helped them out to get started, they found jobs for them. There was never a time when they had to depend on the government for help because whoever came from Europe made it their business to be self-supporting.

SCISSURA: Good. And do you remember if any people from your town who were living in America ever came back to Poland for a visit or for a few weeks or a month or something?

TENZER: Not in our family. In my husband's family, yes. They went back to visit, but not to stay.

SCISSURA: Right. They always came back to America.

TENZER: Always came back.

SCISSURA: So how was your father, was your father writing to your uncle? Were they in touch by letters?

TENZER: Yes. My father would write to my uncle, and when he was here he would write to us. And whatever I had learned from my teacher I would write back to him.

SCISSURA: Right, right. Okay. So your father, then, took the ship and came here before you did. And when he was here, was he

sending money back to your family, to your mother?

TENZER: Oh, yes. He would send money back for my mother to live on, sure.

SCISSURA: Okay. And did you sell your, did your father sell the business that he had in the town, the shoe store, the shoe making business?

TENZER: No. He, while he was living he owned a shoe store. And when he died he still owned a shoe store.

SCISSURA: Right. Did he own a shoe store in Poland also?

TENZER: No.

SCISSURA: No, he was working for someone.

TENZER: In Poland, no. In Poland he would repair shoes and make shoes.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay.

TENZER: He was, see, over there they would take your measurement of the foot and you would pick out the material you wanted, the style you wanted, and somebody would make the shoes.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay. So that was his job.

TENZER: It's different from what you find over in this country, just having things repaired and the shoes already done. No, over there it was tailor-made.

SCISSURA: Uh-huh. I wanted to ask you another question. Did your parents have, did you have grandparents when you were in Poland? Were they living?

TENZER: Yes, we did. I had a grandfather when we left.

SCISSURA: And that was on your mother's or father's side?

TENZER: My mother's side, my mother's side. And after we were here we understood that because of the First World War our grandfather passed away, and other relatives, later on, after the Second World War.

SCISSURA: Right, they passed away also.

TENZER: Yeah.

SCISSURA: Okay. So your father was in New York, and he decided to have your mother and the children come over to America.

TENZER: That's right. After about two years being here he sent for all of us.

SCISSURA: Okay. Did he come and pick you up, or . . .

TENZER: No. My uncle came to pick us up, the one who had brought my father here originally.

SCISSURA: Uh-huh. Was that your father's brother, or . . .

TENZER: My mother's brother.

SCISSURA: Your mother's brother, okay. So he came to Poland to pick you up.

TENZER: No. He came to Ellis Island to pick us up.

SCISSURA: To Ellis Island. So did your father or your uncle send you money in Poland so that you could pay for the trip?

TENZER: Of course. They sent us passports, and that's how, my father must have come steerage, and he didn't want his family to travel that way, so he arranged for us to come tourist class.

SCISSURA: Oh, good. And who came? Who left from the town?

TENZER: My mother, myself, my brother and my sister.

SCISSURA: And where did you leave, where did you take the ship?

TENZER: Where did we leave from?

SCISSURA: Yeah, where did you leave from?

TENZER: From Rotterdam.

SCISSURA: Okay. So you left by train from the town, or . . .

TENZER: We travelled first to, I think, Hamburg. We had to go to Hamburg, and from there we had to go to Rotterdam to get to the ship.

SCISSURA: Right. And how did you go from your town to Hamburg?

TENZER: Train.

SCISSURA: Train. And do you remember what the train ride was like at all?

TENZER: No, I don't recall that.

SCISSURA: And then you took a train from Hamburg to Rotterdam also?

TENZER: Right, right.

SCISSURA: Do you remember the name of the ship that you came over on?

TENZER: The ship was the, I just saw it upstairs. (she pauses) The Noordam.

SCISSURA: The Noordam.

TENZER: I'm pretty sure.

SCISSURA: Okay. And so when you got to the ship how long did it take you to get from your town to the ship? Was it a long trip?

TENZER: The trip must have taken about three weeks.

SCISSURA: From?

TENZER: From the time we left till we arrived.

SCISSURA: Till you arrived in New York. But how about from, just from, on the train. How long was that?

TENZER: I don't recall the train trip at all.

SCISSURA: Okay.

TENZER: I know we were in Hamburg for maybe a day or two until everything was straightened out. But it took about three days, uh, three weeks, until we did come here.

SCISSURA: Right. Can you tell me a little bit about the ship itself? Were there a lot of immigrants coming?

TENZER: Oh, yes. They were, the ship was full.

SCISSURA: It was full.

TENZER: And I do remember one terrible storm where they would

not allow anybody on deck. In fact, they covered the decks with tarpaulin, or whatever it is that they use. Naturally, everybody was frightened silly because of it.

SCISSURA: And you said that you came, you had a cabin, as opposed to being in steerage. You were in a cabin?

TENZER: Yes, we had a cabin.

SCISSURA: Do you remember what that was like?

TENZER: It was very pleasant. We had an upper and a lower berth. My brother slept in the upper berth and I in the lower. And my mother had a berth with my kid sister in the other side. We had a basin in there with water. It was very pleasant. Small, no bigger than this room.

SCISSURA: Right.

TENZER: And I remember the two bunks on this side and another bunk here, and the basin on the corner.

SCISSURA: And do you remember what the food was like on the ship?

TENZER: The food wasn't bad. Like I heard people not knowing what to do with a banana. We didn't.

SCISSURA: You knew what a banana was.

TENZER: I remember giving it to somebody and he didn't know what to do with it. He tried to bite into it without peeling it. (Mr. Scissura laughs) Well, that was it, because we never used to have fresh fruit in the area where we lived. The only thing we would have would be pears and apples and in the nice weather plums, things like that. But oranges, grapefruits, or any tropical fruits were never there.

SCISSURA: That's interesting. On the ship, was it just Polish immigrants, or were there people from other nationalities?

TENZER: I don't think they were all Polish. I'm pretty sure not.

SCISSURA: And did anybody in your family speak any English? Did you or your mother?

TENZER: Oh, my mother was always occupied with the smaller children.

SCISSURA: Right.

TENZER: Oh, she spoke to the people she was able to communicate with, but I imagine the only way she could communicate would be with Yiddish.

SCISSURA: Right. And were there a lot of people who spoke Yiddish on the ship?

TENZER: I wouldn't know that, because I didn't pay much attention. I was too busy playing with my brother and observing other things on board.

SCISSURA: What can you remember about being on board?

TENZER: Well, I remember when my brother fell off from his bunk, and trying to take care of him for a few days because he hurt himself. The food was good, but my mother had also brought a lot of food along with her, because she wasn't sure what she would find. Most of the food that she brought, I think, would be bread and hard-boiled eggs, apples. That's about it.

SCISSURA: Right, right. Okay, so do you remember how long you were on the ship?

TENZER: It was about two weeks.

SCISSURA: About two weeks. And was, other than that one storm was it a rough voyage, or was it pretty calm most of the time?

TENZER: It must have been when we were on the North Sea, you know, out of the North Sea. It was a very bad storm.

SCISSURA: So everybody stayed in their cabins.

TENZER: They weren't allowed out.

SCISSURA: Right.

TENZER: Everybody was sort of locked in.

SCISSURA: Now, when you went to dinner or lunch, did you eat with the people from steerage, or was that separate?

TENZER: No, that was separate dining rooms.

SCISSURA: It was separate dining rooms. So you wouldn't remember what the people from steerage were?

TENZER: No, except that I saw them on deck, and they were segregated, they weren't allowed to come to the area where we were. I guess tourist class was a little bit more expensive, and the other people, they had like a gate to keep them separate.

SCISSURA: Okay. And do you remember making any friends on the ship?

TENZER: No.

SCISSURA: No.

TENZER: I didn't see any other children around me, so I was

just busy with my brother.

SCISSURA: Okay. So when you got to New York, what do you remember about getting into the harbor, and do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty at all?

TENZER: We were so busy being rushed around from place to place trying to keep together.

SCISSURA: Is that on the ship?

TENZER: Probably getting off the ship to the ferry, and getting into Manhattan.

SCISSURA: When you, when the ship pulled into the dock, did it pull into Manhattan?

TENZER: Yeah.

SCISSURA: And did you go up on deck at all, or . . .

TENZER: Everybody went.

SCISSURA: Everybody went up on deck.

SCISSURA: Everybody went up to see because it was something they'd dreamed about.

SCISSURA: And what do you remember seeing?

TENZER: It was so different. We saw, in the distance we'd see buildings, besides just the water, which we had been accustomed to for so long.

SCISSURA: And did these tall buildings impress you as a child?

TENZER: I couldn't understand it, I really couldn't understand, because we had never seen anything like that. I had never seen anything like that before.

SCISSURA: Right. Had you ever been on a ship before?

TENZER: No.

SCISSURA: Or a train? Was that your first time on the train also?

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: So were you scared, as a child? Do you remember being scared or excited?

TENZER: No, not scared. But I remember when we were boarding my mother gave my kid brother a hat box, and she had a wig in there. She told him to hold it. And going up the gangplank he dropped it and naturally it fell into the water. See, European women at that time, when they were married they had their hair shaved off and they wore wigs. So she wore a wig every day, but

she had one for dress-up.

SCISSURA: Right. And were you excited about coming to see your father?

TENZER: Naturally it was exciting.

SCISSURA: Was your mother excited also?

TENZER: Couldn't help being excited.

SCISSURA: Now, you said you had a grandfather on your mother's side.

TENZER: Yeah.

SCISSURA: So he remained in Poland?

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: Was your mother upset leaving her father behind?

TENZER: Well, she couldn't do anything else. That was the only thing she could do. She couldn't stay home and take care of her father. There were other relatives who would look after him.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay. So would you say that the main purpose for you coming here was money?

TENZER: To be together, and make a better life for all the family.

SCISSURA: And not be as persecuted as a Jewish person.

TENZER: Right, right.

SCISSURA: Okay. So when you got off the ship, do you remember if there were crowds of people getting off the ship?

TENZER: I remember it was a beautiful hot day. The sun was shining and everybody was bustling all over the place. And my uncle rushing us. I think it was an elevated train, to take us to wherever we were going to be.

SCISSURA: What month did you say this was?

TENZER: August.

SCISSURA: August. And when you got off the ship, did they take you on a ferry to Ellis Island?

TENZER: Must have. It must have. I don't actually remember that, but that's probably the only way they could do it.

SCISSURA: And what do you remember about being here on Ellis Island?

TENZER: Well, Ellis Island, we didn't stay long. I remember

when the doctor examined us. My mother was holding my sister, and she was sleeping in her arms, and he checked my brother and myself off and he let us go, and then he wanted to see the baby.

So my mother said, "She's all right, but she's sleeping." He said, "You put her down." She had to stand her down and make sure that the child was normal and she could stand or walk or whatever.

SCISSURA: Right. So the four of you were checked by the doctors as soon as you got here.

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: And did they feed you here, or did they give you a meal on Ellis Island?

TENZER: I don't remember that. I don't think we were here that long.

SCISSURA: And what do you remember the building being like?

TENZER: Crowded. Thousands of people all over the place.

SCISSURA: Did you get to meet anybody here who spoke Yiddish?

TENZER: No, no. When my uncle met us we were so glad that we knew somebody, you know. That he was, he knew just how to go about it, because he had been living in this country for a

number of years. He knew where to go and what to do. And we didn't spend any time here.

SCISSURA: Did your uncle meet you here on Ellis? Did he meet you on the island?

TENZER: He came on the island, right.

SCISSURA: So he met you before you were examined and, did he meet you before you were examined by the doctor, or after? . . .

TENZER: I don't think so, no. I think we were examined first.

SCISSURA: And then he met you.

TENZER: Yeah.

SCISSURA: So you really weren't here that long.

TENZER: No.

SCISSURA: Would you say it was a few hours, or?

TENZER: We weren't here any time on the island except to get off the ship, be examined here, and . . .

SCISSURA: Right. And then set off.

TENZER: Moved out.

SCISSURA: So you were processed and all your papers were in order.

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: And your uncle met you.

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: And when you got back, did you go to Manhattan at first?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: And your uncle took you where your father was?

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: And where was that?

TENZER: And my uncle took us up to my father's sister in the Bronx.

SCISSURA: Oh, your father had a sister here also.

TENZER: Yes. He had family here before.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay. Who was here on your father's side?

TENZER: Well, his sister and her family were here, and there

were other people that we knew from Europe who were in this country.

SCISSURA: And they lived in the Bronx, you said.

TENZER: Most of them lived in the Bronx.

SCISSURA: Do you remember what area of the Bronx it was?

TENZER: What area? Now I couldn't tell you.

SCISSURA: Or what street? Do you know what street it was?

TENZER: I couldn't tell you that, because we only stayed with them until my father found an apartment for us.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay.

TENZER: And as soon as he found an apartment for us we moved into our own home.

SCISSURA: And what was it like seeing your father again after two years?

TENZER: (she laughs) You can't describe things like that.

SCISSURA: Very exciting.

TENZER: It's wonderful.

SCISSURA: Yeah. Was he home when you got there?

TENZER: Oh, yes. He was waiting for us, naturally.

SCISSURA: Right, right. And how did, do you remember seeing your mother and your father? Were they, do you remember how happy they were?

TENZER: You can't describe things like that. You gather around in a cluster, you know, hugging one another.

SCISSURA: It must have been very emotional.

TENZER: It is, it is.

SCISSURA: But you were happy. Were you sad at all? I mean, did you miss Poland at all, or did you miss your friends or relatives there at all?

TENZER: No. I was happy to be with my father and to see that my mother was finally settled and happy herself.

SCISSURA: So you said that you left your aunt's house and you moved into your own apartment? And where was that?

TENZER: Yes. We only stayed with my aunt maybe a week, until they found an apartment.

SCISSURA: Where did you move to?

TENZER: We lived at 150th Street right off Fifth Avenue, at the time. And on the street there was a public school, too. So being we came just before school opened up I remember my mother taking my brother and myself to school to register us.

SCISSURA: Okay. Was that a Polish neighborhood, or . . .

TENZER: Where we lived?

SCISSURA: Yeah. Or was it a Yiddish, Jewish neighborhood?

TENZER: No. There were Jewish people there, yes, but it was not, that I know, any particular group of people living there. We lived there because it was convenient for my father, to my father's business.

SCISSURA: Where did he have the business?

TENZER: On Lenox Avenue, about 136th Street and Lenox Avenue, around where the hospital is now.

SCISSURA: Right, right. And you and your brother and your sister went to school. Or your sister was too little.

TENZER: She was too little. She was only a baby at the time.

SCISSURA: Right. But your brother and yourself went to school.

TENZER: Yes. We went to school right away.

SCISSURA: And can you tell me a little bit about what the apartment was like?

TENZER: Going to school?

SCISSURA: No. What, how your apartment was. Was it a big apartment, or . . .

TENZER: Well, we had two bedrooms and a living room and a kitchen. That's what I remember. It was not luxurious, but it was very convenient. We had our own bathroom, which a lot of buildings downtown did not.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay. So you didn't have to share a bathroom with anyone.

TENZER: No.

SCISSURA: That was good. And what was it like going to school, because you didn't speak any English, right?

TENZER: I remember being given tests. The teacher gave me a book to read. Naturally I read in Polish, because it didn't make sense, to me it didn't make sense to her, but the alphabet in Polish is the same as in English. So, then she gave me some examples in arithmetic, and I worked them out, and approved

them, which seemed at the time to be advanced to the way they were taught here, because they hadn't reached the part where they prove an example. They didn't know what to do with me. The language was a barrier, you know. But they put me in 2-B. I don't know what equivalent that is to grades now. And my brother went to kindergarten.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

TENZER: So that's the extent of my beginning of schooling.

SCISSURA: Right. And how long did it take you to learn English, to fully learn?

TENZER: Well, by the time I graduated I was very good in everything but my report card said, "Deficient in English."

SCISSURA: Okay. You graduated high school, or grammar school?

TENZER: I graduated public school, very unhappy I couldn't go to high school. My parents couldn't afford to keep me in high school because by that time I was about fifteen years old. Anyway, they compromised and they sent me to business school.

SCISSURA: Oh, okay. That was good. When you started school when you first got here, did your father speak English already?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: Did he understand English?

TENZER: He spoke English brokenly, but he spoke English.
Otherwise he couldn't . . .

SCISSURA: So he made himself understood.

TENZER: Otherwise he couldn't be in a business.

SCISSURA: Right, right. And did your mother learn how to speak
any English?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: So she was able to also help out in the business.

TENZER: Right, right. And children, as we came along, you
know, with our homework and so on, she learned from us.

SCISSURA: Right, right. And tell me a little bit about the
religious life when you got here. Did you go to, was it as
strong as it was in Poland?

TENZER: I can't say that, no. It was more open in this
country. It was more open than it was, the way I remember it in
Europe, it was altogether different. First of all, when you're
in business you have to keep the business open. You can't close

it because of a holiday. And for that reason my father had to keep the store open. That was against our religion. So little by little you sort of slacken up on the religion.

SCISSURA: Right. But, did you go to synagogue at all?

TENZER: But at home, at home we were strictly religious.

SCISSURA: You were religious at home also. And did you celebrate holidays like you did back in Europe?

TENZER: Always, always.

SCISSURA: Did you get together with your aunt and maybe your uncle?

TENZER: Always. There was no break there, except that when it came to business he had to make a living.

SCISSURA: He put the business first, of course. And do you remember whether your father was making a good living here, or was it still difficult?

TENZER: Well, I wouldn't say he was a millionaire, but he provided for the family. And we were all happy. The children got married. I had a brother born in this country.

SCISSURA: Oh, so you had, you had two brothers, then.

TENZER: Right.

SCISSURA: And when your mother got here did she, when she used to cook, did she keep the same traditional meals of the old country, or did she Americanize a little bit?

TENZER: She learned a lot about the American way of doing things. She was, I wouldn't say she was old-fashioned.

SCISSURA: Were you kosher in your eating?

TENZER: Yes, definitely.

SCISSURA: You were kosher, okay. And did your parents and yourself find a large Jewish community here in New York at the time?

TENZER: A large?

SCISSURA: A large Jewish community, or . . .

TENZER: Not where we lived, no. No.

SCISSURA: Not really.

TENZER: No. Holiday time, well, there were, nowadays there are temples and there are centers, and at that time they used to gather maybe in a store. They'd make it a religious place to meet and do things.

SCISSURA: Right.

TENZER: But they observed their religion as much as was possible.

SCISSURA: Right. And did you stay in that apartment that you moved into for a long time, or did you move somewhere else?

TENZER: No, no. We had to move because of the area changed, it became colored. And at that time we lived about 150th Street and Fifth Avenue. We moved to Eighth Avenue, which was definitely white, all white. And we stayed there for years and years, in fact, until I got married.

SCISSURA: And you mentioned that you went to business school?

TENZER: Did I make what?

SCISSURA: You went to business school, or high school?

TENZER: I went to business school, Eastman Gaines Business School at that time. I don't know if it's in existence now, but it has a very good reputation.

SCISSURA: And what type of job did you . . .

TENZER: A secretary.

SCISSURA: Secretary. And you said you got married.

TENZER: Yes. I got married in 1926.

SCISSURA: And did your sister get married also?

TENZER: Yes.

SCISSURA: And your two brothers.

TENZER: They all got married.

SCISSURA: And everybody did well for themselves.

TENZER: Right, right. No drain on the family.

SCISSURA: Right. And your parents were happy to be here.

TENZER: They seemed happy. They were happy to see us settle down and have our own life.

SCISSURA: Well, good. So, all in all, would you say that your father was right in coming to America?

TENZER: Oh, definitely. It was much easier for him to make a living here than it would have been. I don't know how things would have turned out there with the wars and all.

SCISSURA: So you're happy to be here then, naturally. Well, it was very nice . . .

TENZER: I consider this my country.

SCISSURA: This is your country now.

TENZER: I never think of the other, and I would never want to go back there.

SCISSURA: So you have happy memories of America?

TENZER: Happy memories, and I think I'm a very blessed person. I have a wonderful family of my own. I'm very proud of all of them.

SCISSURA: Good. Well, it was very nice meeting you, and I'm glad we were able to do this interview today.

MR. TENZER: I hope you got what you're looking for.

SCISSURA: We did, we did. This is Carlo Scissura for the National Park Service signing off.