

EI-349

BARBARA CSATI PAPP

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HUNGARY, 1921

RESIDENCE: SZABOLAS, NEGYE

AGE 8

US RESIDENCE: TRENTON, NJ

PASSAGE ON "THE ROTTERDAM"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: ROTTERDAM

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

It's July 17, 1993, and I'm here at the Ellis Island studio with Mrs. Barbara Papp, who came from Hungary.

Her name at that time was Borbala Csati. And she was eight years old, and it was 1921. I want to welcome you and tell you how happy I am that you're here today, and I really look forward to hearing your personal history.

PAPP: It is a great pleasure for me to be here, and it's a great honor.

LEVINE: Good. I'm glad.

PAPP: I was quite young when I came, but it was different,

different stages of my young life that are, cannot be forgotten.

LEVINE: Well, why don't we start at the beginning. Perhaps you can tell me where you were born and when you were born.

PAPP: I was born December 9, 1912 in Szabolcs Negye, Szabolcs, in Hungary.

LEVINE: Could you spell the town, please?

PAPP: S-Z-A-B-O-L-C-S, county, and Szabolcs Negye, Szabolcs (?). N-E-G-Y-E. Szabolcs Negye.

LEVINE: And did you live there for the entire eight years before you came to the United States?

PAPP: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And I had a brother who was twenty months older than I was.

LEVINE: What was his name?

PAPP: Michael. And I had a, I had a sister who was fourteen months younger than myself, whose name was Julia.

LEVINE: And your mother, do you remember your mother at all? Tell me about her.

PAPP: Yes, I do remember just a couple of things about my mother. My father was away to war and left us three children with my mother. We were all sick at the same time.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you were sick with?

PAPP: Uh, I, we all had the measles, all three of us. And my mother had the flu. And she had to get out of her sick bed to cook for us. And I'll never forget it. She was making eel soup. Somebody had caught eels, and she was cooking them. So I went out in the kitchen to see what she was doing, and she took a hold of me and picked me up, and she says, she hugged me close to her body, she says, "I don't know what you children are ever going to do if I die." And I was only three years old at the time, but I can't forget it, because my mother said this to me. "Why is my mother going to die?" And it was not too long after we had to move in with my grandfather. I don't remember the moving day at all. But prior to that my mother sent me over to my grandfather's house to get some milk, which was practically across the street. And then we moved in with my grandfather. My mother was getting well. In fact, she went to the doctor by

herself, which was, they tell me, a terrible, terrible long walk. And that night she became very ill again.

She had the flu. And the following night she had a relapse and my mother died. And I remember at that time they didn't have any kind of, any way to preserve the body, so the body had to be buried the very same day. And I still recall how my mother was laid on the bed, how they brought the coffin in, how they lifted her body with the sheet into the coffin, and the service was held out in your own yard. This was only people who, political or somebody with great wealth, was permitted to be buried from the church. All the service was held out in the yard. And then the body, the coffin was put on a wagon and carried out to the cemetery.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the service?

PAPP: No, I don't. All I know, they had all kinds of church flags and all, you know, when they would, people who carried these flags led the wagon all the way out to the cemetery. The cemetery in our town was gorgeous.

In fact, years back, they tell me, that county was named after the cemetery. And I still, if I was taken to Hungary, to my town, I believe I could find my

mother's grave.

LEVINE: So she was laid to rest in a beautiful place.

PAPP: In a beautiful place. So then we children were all divided up. Different relatives took each one of us. It was . . .

LEVINE: Who did you go with?

PAPP: I don't remember the name. It was a very distant relative. My sister was taken by my aunt, my father's sister. She says, "I will take the youngest one." She had two boys. And somebody else took my brother. So we were all separated, all three of us children. We didn't see each other at all until my father came home from the war.

LEVINE: How much longer, later, was that?

PAPP: Uh, I guess it must have been a year, because I know I was, I was taken ill, and these people who took care of me had to take me to the doctor, and I had to lay out in the sun. So I know it had to be summertime. So I just judged by that that it must have been at least a year before my father came back. And when my father came home from war, he went to the house where

he left us, and we weren't there. So the people who were living in the house told him, "I can't tell you anything. Go to your father's house." So all he had to do was practically go across the street to his father. Well, I've been told that when my father heard that my mother was dead and we children were all scattered in different places, he was so devastated that he wanted to commit suicide, and kill us children. The family had a hard time to handle him. And they got him calmed down and said, "Now, the right thing for you to do is to find a nice girl or woman and bring the children home, because you can't do this to your life." So he did find a single girl, and he got married. They were only married a short period of time when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in Hungary. The way I understand, we had a lot of Roumanian, from the Roumanian country. Because, you see, it's the Roumanians who allowed the Russians to invade Hungary. So till today there's a bitter resentment between the Hungarians and the Roumanians, because they did this. And that's where all the problems, the war had escalated, and every country surrounding Hungary was taking a bite out of it. So at that time we had Roumanians in our country. So my

father, we had to evacuate from the center of our more populated area of the town where we lived, out to the outside part, because the enemy, whoever they were, Roumanians, were going to bomb the town. So being a soldier, my father couldn't live with this. We were in this huge house, several people from the center of the town, and no one was allowed to go out on the street. See, in these European countries, when you're given an order, they mean it. If you leave and they say you're going to be shot, they're going to shoot you. My father crawled out on the back window of that house, and went over to the church to put the white flag out that there's no enemy there, so they don't bomb the town. I recall when everybody was looking, "Where's my Taddy? Where's my Taddy?" He was not around. As I'm telling you this, all of a sudden we hear this horrible bang, then another one. First thing we knew, nobody cared whether they could get out on the street or not. One man, I could just picture him running in, into this yard through this huge gate, carrying my father's hat. "My poor Taddy was just killed! My poor Taddy was just killed!" He did get the white flag out in the church steeple, but he had to go, like here was the church, here was the school

house, and then the minister's house. He went past the school. He got to the minister's house, because he had to go past that to get across, back to the house that he left. And there was an outhouse at the end of the minister's house, because they didn't have facilities like we have here. And eyewitnesses saw him do what he was doing, and when he got to the end of the minister's house, the back of it, he heard this, whatever they were shooting, coming. They said they were shooting into a tree. Whatever they were shooting, it hit the minister's wall, the house, and it buried my father alive, just as his hand was on the outside door, outhouse door. So they had to dig him out.

LEVINE: I'm sorry. I don't understand. How did it bury him alive?

PAPP: Well, the wall fell on him.

LEVINE: Oh.

PAPP: The minis . . . The wall, when this bomb or whatever they were shooting hit the minister's wall, it buried him alive. So when they brought him home, I could still remember that, in a tablecloth. Somebody, one

of the people living who saw all this brought a tablecloth and put his body in it and brought it back to where we were, in this evacuated home. But his body was black from whatever they were shooting, you know, had turned his body black. So his youngest sister, we were little kids, we, they didn't want none of us to go near him, to see this, but I was tiny, and I crawled between the people, "I want to see my father. I want to see my father." I didn't realize that he was dead. And his sister had to wash him. But I never remembered the burial. And I remember a box that they brought. A carpenter made a casket. You couldn't go buying any caskets at the time. And they put his body in that box. So my brother is the one who told me. I says, "Michael, I can never remember anything about our father's burial." He says, "Sis, you won't, because they buried him at night. You weren't allowed," he says, "to go out on the street for anything like this." But at that moment when he was killed, nobody cared. Everybody was devastated about this. So he says, "They buried him at night time." He says, "They carried his body, the men from the town carried his body. They dug the grave at night time, and buried him next to my

mother." So now we were orphans altogether. We had a stepmother.

LEVINE: How old were you then?

PAPP: I judge to be, I judge to be about six years old at this point.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your father that you had?

PAPP: Uh, very little. I cannot get myself back to remembering much about it. Just, just at the time when we had the Revolution, he was away so much. They had to go dig trenches. Day and night they were digging trenches. And my sister and I, we were stumbling over the trenches that my father dug to evacuate into another town across the Tsar River. So, and we had to get across in barges. But I remember one thing my father did at one time which I, he (she laughs) he brought home a wild turkey. (they laugh) And when he brought, he brought it in from the main pantry of the house, because everything was very primitive living there, he put it under the bed in a burlap bag. And he woke us children up, and we heard this thing gurgling. And what in the world

is it? In the room. So my father says, he wanted us to get up and see what he brought. So out he pulled this bag. This is what, you see, he didn't want us to get frightened, oh, and this huge turkey. But do you know to this day I don't remember how it was cooked. (they laugh) But that's the only, the only thing that I really remember my father, only the hardship that we went through during, during the Revolution. And they were only married nine months when he was killed.

LEVINE: What did he do for work when he wasn't being a soldier?

PAPP: He was a farmer. Everybody there did farming. He was a, it was a farming town, you know. Hungary was known for their farmlands, raising grapes.

LEVINE: Is that what the main crop was, grapes?

PAPP: Uh, not only. Potatoes, corn, poppies. You know, poppy seeds? That field is gorgeous when it's in bloom. And they exported, poppies. And people would sublet land from the wealthier people who owned a lot of land. And, of course, whatever you grew, you had so much to keep for yourself, and some of it you had

to give to the person that you sublet the land from.
That's . . .

LEVINE: What . . . I'm sorry.

PAPP: That's the way people grew all their necessities for
the winter.

LEVINE: What was the composition of the town? It was
Hungarians, Roumanians?

PAPP: No.

LEVINE: No?

PAPP: We were only Hungarians.

LEVINE: Were there Jewish people in the town, and Gentiles as
well?

PAPP: There was one, two Jewish people. One had a saloon,
and the other one had a little grocery store, and
that's it.

LEVINE: And everyone else was pretty much a farmer? I mean,
that was the most common . . .

PAPP: Yes. The most common, yes. But, and we had one very,
very wealthy man there. They only had one child, but

he was, he was lord and king of the town, really.

LEVINE: Do you remember him at all, as a child?

PAPP: I remember of him. His son used to go to school in the, in dress clothes, you know, in a suit. Where our people had little britches, his son always went to school in a suit. But we only had a one-room schoolhouse. All the grades were in one room. And every family who had a child going to school had to donate wood to keep the wood stove burning during the winter months and cold. A beautiful stove, I'll never forget it. It was huge.

LEVINE: A ceramic stove?

PAPP: Yes. It was enamel, enamel. And I went to school for a very, very short period of time before the Revolution broke out. And I recall I had, I didn't know my ABC's fluently. When the teacher called you, you had to say your ABC's. And I missed something. I don't remember what. So I had to put my hand out, and I was slapped with the stick. And I missed something. I don't remember what. So I had to put my hand out, and I was slapped with the stick, because I didn't know my ABC's. And, oh, that thing stayed on your

hand for, they didn't just make you just feel it tenderly, it was a slap. So . . .

LEVINE: What do you remember about the house you lived in? Can you describe it?

PAPP: Well, it was a very primitive house. It belonged to my grandfather.

LEVINE: What was his name?

PAPP: (?) And first you walked into a huge room. That's where most of the cooking was done, and the huge oven was there where you baked your bread. And also, when you brought in corn from the fields, it would be dumped in that room and people would come and help you take it off the cob or husk the corn. You know, people helped each other. Off of this large room there was what they called the front of the house, the front house. That was one, that was the largest room. My grandfather's oldest daughter lived in there with her family. The whole family lived in one room. Now, when we moved in there, we had the back house. Both rooms entered into this one huge room. And we all lived in that one room. There were two beds in there. WE three little children slept in one bed. Of

course, my sister was still in the cradle for a long time. And then my parents had a bed on the other side of the wall. On the end of this building there was a storage room where no windows were in there. All your cereals, like your beans and bacon that you had cured for the winter and all, was all put up across the ceiling on rods, you know, and hung there. It was a storage room for grains. And that was the extent of the house. After that, my grandfather had a stable. We were fortunate. We had a cow. And he raised honeybees, and he used to sell the honey. And I had a gorgeous, gorgeous flower garden, but we weren't allowed to go in there because of the honeybees. It was always full of bees. The flowers were grown, all kinds of flowers. He knew what to plant so that he has the honey.

LEVINE: Did you have particular chores as a child around the house?

PAPP: Uh, we were really too young. We did wash, we were taught to wash dishes. And, you know, all our floors, to come back to the house, were all dirt floors. And you had to go out every spring time, the walls were all whitewashed religiously every spring. And the

floors were all done over with clay. It's like a, like a brick-colored clay. You had it, to get a certain thing in order to mix this with water, and then you would take a cloth and wash the floor with it. But this had to dry hard before you could put the furniture on. And then it was just like a . . .

LEVINE: Wood?

PAPP: Concrete, and you swept it. You used a broom or a brush or whatever. But we had no wooden floors.

LEVINE: What did you do for water?

PAPP: Well, we were lucky with that, because we had a well just at the corner of my grandfather's house. WE had to carry all the wood we needed from the well.

LEVINE: And what did you burn for heat?

PAPP: Wood. Wood, and my brother was a tiny little fellow also. He used to have to go out and scrounge around for kindling wood. (they laugh) And I would call him coming home, tied on his back, you know, because for your stove you needed, you needed the heavier pieces. And I'll tell you, there was a lot of poverty. Sometimes you'd run out of matches, you

didn't have matches, and people would go and borrow fire from the next door neighbor to come in, if your fire went out, to start the fire again. I recall that.

PAPP: Do you recall any food that your mother or your stepmother made?

PAPP: Oh, we ate a lot of bean soup, potato soup, and noodles, noodles with cabbage, and noodles with potatoes. And what I used to love, when they were baking bread they used to make grated potato cakes, but over there it was put into a tray almost the size of this table and pushed in the oven and baked, and then you would slice it. And then when the time came for watermelon, I could still taste the watermelon and the cantaloupes that, you know, were so good. But we didn't consume a lot of meat. People just couldn't afford it. And if you were lucky enough, my grandfather did always raise a pig. And in the wintertime they would kill it and preserve the meat and make bacon. And you rationed that through the winter.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your grandfather?

PAPP: Well, as a little girl, my grandfather was a very loving-type old man. I remember the Hungarian prayers and the songs he used to . . .

LEVINE: Really.

PAPP: Yes.

LEVINE: Could you either say it, or just sing a little bit of it that you remember?

PAPP: No, not really, no. But when we came as little kids, we were able to, you know, say a lot of these prayers, you know, that he had taught us. And the Lord's Prayer, he taught us. And that I say every single night, and always in Hungarian. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your grandfather told you about what you should do or shouldn't do, or life in general?

PAPP: Well, I remember at one time, at the only time my grandfather ever laid a hand on any of us three little children. After the Revolution was over, there was a lot of bombs and things that the soldiers left behind that was very dangerous. So my uncle came through. He worked, that was my mother's brother. He worked in

the post office. He had a very good job. And he came through with the bell, ringing the bell, and he would always stop at the corner where we lived with my grandfather, so you didn't have to go far to listen to him. And he, he was what they called the town crier, and he had the bullhorn. And he had this announcement to make. "Anybody finding any relics, in a field, on a street, anywhere, please immediately report it to the police." They called them the chender. That's what the police was called. "Do not touch anything that you don't know what it is." You know, metal, or whatever it may be. Well, lo and behold, my brother, curious, as little kids are, with his boy friend, found one of these hand grenades, and it had a little string on it or whatever and they start playing with it, instead of leaving it alone and reporting it like they were told. And he brought it home. My grand . . . And he burned his hand. Oh, my grandfather was livid. He did . . . (she laughs) I still see it. He spanked him good and hard. He said, "You're lucky you didn't lose your hand. You weren't supposed to touch anything. You were told not to. If you see anything, you have to report it." That's the only time my grandfather ever laid a hand

on us children.

LEVINE: Okay. I think this is a good place to pause so we can turn the tape over. We'll resume in a second.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now, on Side B. So, go ahead. You were saying about, your stepmother had only been married to your father for nine months.

PAPP: They were only married nine months when the Revolution broke out. And all of a sudden she decided, a meeting was called with the family. I don't recall exactly who all was there, but I know all three of us children were there. And she told them that she had decided that she doesn't feel she should be responsible for taking care of three children. And . . .

LEVINE: Was your grandfather there?

PAPP: Yes. But my grandfather was up in his years, and he couldn't handle it. He wouldn't be any way, you know, he wouldn't be capable of handling us three children. So she wanted us put in an orphanage. So none of the family seemed to volunteer to take any of us children,

but my stepmother wanted to keep me. So when I heard this, I says, "No, I don't want to go with you. I want to go where my sister and brother are going." So I don't know what took place after that day, but that, it couldn't have been more than a couple of days later we got a letter from my uncle, from America, my father's oldest brother. He was the oldest sibling. And wanted to know about the family. Because prior to that, through the war and through the Revolution, see, there was no mail. He wanted to know about the family, the children, his brother, you know, and his sisters. So that is where the procedure started. So my stepmother wrote to him, and so did my uncle, my mother's brother, who was the town crier, that our parents are both dead, and my father was killed, and were proceeding to put the children in an orphanage. So when he got the letter, they immediately wrote back, "Don't do anything." Because he was going to try to see if he could get the children over here to America. But now there was opposition on his wife's side. She didn't feel that he should bring all three of us children. Why not bring one of her brother's children? They were all grown. So they had a meeting over here with the family, in America. So my uncles

had four children. They were all grown. One was married. And he says, "If you're going to bring the children, either bring all of them or none of them. It's not fair to split them up." So my uncle's wife was very much against it. And this time they wrote back that they were making procedures to bring the children to America. Now my stepmother chimed in. "If you believe in God, take me with them also." Now, she wanted to come. So . . .

LEVINE: What was she like? You were her favorite, I presume.

PAPP: Yes. The way it seemed to me, I was her favorite.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with her over there?

PAPP: Not too much, not too much. But, so it was so decided they're going to bring her, too. But now we run into legal problems. Because she was not our mother, my uncle was not adopting us. We were traveling as orphans. So I brought an affidavit with me that he had to swear that we would not be a burden to the country, the county or the state in any way, if we were allowed to land in America.

LEVINE: Did your uncle send you the tickets?

PAPP: Yes. Yes, but it took, I guess it took about nine months from the time he started this until we got on a ship and got here.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting ready to leave?

PAPP: Oh, yes. We went, my stepmother took us visiting everybody we can visit and say goodbye to. And the children, the children envied us. They says, "Oh," he says, "how lucky you are. You're going to America. You're going to find gold on the streets."
(she laughs) "You're going to be wealthy." You know. (she laughs) So . . .

LEVINE: Did you feel like it . . .

PAPP: I felt, yes, I felt the way they did. (she laughs)
Because we were little kids, that's all we knew. That's what we heard, you know. But it wasn't that way. (she laughs) But, uh, still the experience, the experience can never be forgotten. It was wonderful.

LEVINE: The trip, you mean.

PAPP: The trip, yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me what happened when you left your town?

PAPP: (she laughs) Ho! That was something else. I, we only brought bare necessities. My stepmother had a basket. We all had to carry some little thing in our hands, you know. And you had mostly the clothes you had on your back, because there was just no place where you could put anything. Uh, you know, once you got on the train, we were told, you know, we were going to have to travel on the train. I think we were traveling all night. But then getting on the train was something else. Massive, people were, they were putting children into the train through the window. We had to hold on to our mother's skirt. And my uncle, who was the town crier, he escorted us all the way to Holland, till we got on the ship, from Hungary to Holland. He came with us, because she couldn't handle three children. She was told that. You could never, never handle three children, to get them on the train and all. Which I was able to see why. He, we had to hold like the chain reaction, hold onto each other, so you don't get separated, because there were so many people there. So we had two seats, you know, like you and I, facing each other. Three sat on one

side, three on the other. We were traveling all night. And what an experience! We used to, naturally you fall asleep. Lo and behold, all of a sudden my uncle wakes up and he grabs his jacket. The thieves had cut his pocket open on his suit, and he had the money in the inside pocket of his lapel, and they stole the money, all the money we needed for our trip.

So he immediately contacted the conductor, and he came, went with my uncle, and the first thing they went to was the men's room on the train. And there were the thieves, the two of them, counting out, dividing up the money. Fortunately he got all of it back. But that was really some experience. Oh, we were so upset. I remember that very, very distinctly.

Then when we got to Holland, I had real wooden shoes on. We had to, we had to undress, stark naked, in line for the shower. We had more showers and more vaccinations. But you lost all modesty.

(she laughs) You had to stand in a line naked to shower. I believe I had eight vaccinations before we got to America.

LEVINE: How long were you in Holland?

PAPP: I don't remember. It couldn't have been very long

until the ship left, you know. Because we went into port, and they processed you, and you go through examination again. That's all they did all the time, keep examining your body, your hair, and sticking needles in you.

LEVINE: Did you stay in some kind of a place arranged by the steamship company?

PAPP: No. If I recall, I think we went right on the ship.

LEVINE: How did you get the wooden shoes?

PAPP: Oh, they supplied them there, where you go into the shower room. We had real wooden shoes on.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, then, do you remember the name of the ship?

PAPP: No, I don't. But my sister, is there such a ship called Rotterdam? Well, she said that's the name of the ship.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

PAPP: Can you imagine? She remembers better than I do. Yeah, Rotterdam.

LEVINE: The Rotterdam, uh-huh. And so, what was your experience aboard ship?

PAPP: Well, there's not too much that I remember aboard ship, and I could never understand why. And I talked to my brother about it, and he says, "Sis, you won't, because we thought you were going to die." He says, "You were in the hospital most of our trip." I . . .

LEVINE: On the ship you were in the hospital?

PAPP: On the ship. He says, "You were very, very ill. They didn't think you were going to make it." But I do remember all the sick people, you know, after what I do remember. And nobody seemed to care. That's what I can't understand. How'd they allow all these people to be laying on the floor and nobody caring about them?

LEVINE: Was this in steerage, where they were lying on the floor?

PAPP: Up on deck, up on deck. In steerage you have, oh, the whole floor was covered with cots, and they were almost touching each other, and that's what you slept on. The whole floor was covered with it. But up on

deck, and one day the men are carrying some, it looked like some kind of a box, and it was covered down. And they were, they hooked some kind of a plank onto the railing of the ship, and they put this box on this plank. And us children were, not only my brother and sister and I, but others, and watching this. And they lifted this plank, and let the box go down into the ocean. So my brother says, "Sis, do you know what that is?" "No," I says, "Mike, what is it? What did they put in the water." "Somebody died," he says. "That was a coffin." Oh, and I couldn't get over it. At that time there was no way to preserve bodies, so they were, you were buried into the ocean.

LEVINE: It sounds like you were close to your brother Mike.

PAPP: Yes. I, uh, well, he was the oldest.

LEVINE: Do you remember him, any experiences with him that, from your childhood?

PAPP: Well, oh, (she laughs) he, he used to take us, like, down to the water, you know, and show us how to, you know, he used to get a stick and go fishing, you know. And he was a great swimmer. I mean, over there, you grew up fast. Ms. Levine, you don't remember being a

child really, because all children grow up so fast in those primitive countries. And he used to go out, you know, pick berries or fruit and bring it home to us children. We were not permitted away from the house.

I mean, children didn't run the streets like they do here. You were more or less at home as a little child. And I remember, all little children are utilized for something. WE had to watch the geese, you know, or watch baby ducks so they don't go out in the street or stray away from the yard. And we used to have to pick, uh, a certain kind of grass and chop it up for them for nutrition. But little children had little chores to do, and you had to husk corn and take corn off the cob. You all had some little thing that you had to do. But my brother, as young as he was, he had to chop wood for the winter, and he was only, when we came to America he was ten years old, but he knew how to chop wood.

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

PAPP: Oh, my uncle wrote to us in a letter that when the boat's coming in to New York, he says, or to America, "You will see a huge statue of a lady. Look for her. And when you see that, you will know that you are in

America." Well, my stepmother is the one who first noticed it, and she told us, "Look, look." She says, "We're in America. There is the big statue." Oh, and we got so excited. And, you know, on the ship, the upper class people used to throw money down to the poor children. My stepmother never allowed us to take part in this. And I says, "Look, look all the money they're getting." She says, "No, honey. I don't want you to do that." Once in a while you would see a green bill flying down. And oh, the children used to scramble for it, you know. But we were never allowed to go. (she laughs) She just didn't believe in that. But when we got off the ship here, when we reached Ellis Island, we came across in little ships, in little boats. And I recall one of the little boats had a fire on it. And I wouldn't be surprised if that boat burned altogether. Actual huge flames were on it. So I says, "Oh, thank God we're not on it." We didn't have to have something like this happen to us.

But . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember arriving at Ellis Island and what your impression was?

PAPP: You have no idea the people. The people who were in

that hall, they were like sardines in a can. That's all I remember of it. But we had to hold onto each other and hang onto my stepmother's skirt so we don't get stranded somewhere. But we were here as, to the best of my knowledge, about three days.

LEVINE: Did your uncle come here?

PAPP: Yes. We were not, we couldn't, my uncle couldn't pick us up because of the legal problems. First of all, he had to have signers. I don't know how many signers he had to have, with the monetary value of ten thousand dollars. That if he couldn't keep us, that these signers would have to do so. And I recall, I know one of them was Mr. Gold. He was the owner of the cigar factory where my uncle's oldest daughter worked. She went to him, because she was the star employee in the plant. And she took the privilege to ask Mr. Gold, and he signed the paper for her. Can you imagine? And, but that wasn't enough. When we got to Ellis Island, he had to post what they called a liberty bond to get us out of here. Well, now he was without funds. He spent all the money he had to get us here. So we were detained, and if he didn't come up with the money, we were being sent back. So he, they made

arrangements with his family. They were going to pay this monthly.

LEVINE: Did he have a job, your uncle, here?

PAPP: He was a carpenter, and he also did farming.

LEVINE: In New York?

PAPP: No, in New Jersey, in New Jersey. He built his own home where we went, where he took us. So when they, uh, the steamship agent, Mr. Jungussie, who handled this, had to come with him to New York to make arrangements that they're going to pay this thousand dollars monthly, I don't know how much they paid every month, until the thousand dollars was paid. But when my younger, when my sister, who was the youngest, would be sixteen years old, he would get the money back. It was with that understanding. But Ms. Levine, every month, from New York, from I don't know what office, the school wherever we went, this letter would follow us. It, oh, it was a paper about this big. All kind of questions, whether it was, how we, whether, our attendance, our grades, and punctuality, everything had to be answered, all three of us children, until we were sixteen years old.

LEVINE: How did you feel about that?

PAPP: Well, we felt, this is what had to be done. Once my teacher, in junior high, because I was only, I was almost nine years old when I started school, and I started in first grade. So did my brother. My sister was in kindergarten. So in eighth grade I was sixteen years old. So we just got used to it. It has to be that way, so what are you going to do? We had, it was very hard for the other children to get adjusted to us. Because . . .

LEVINE: Were you the only children who had immigrated in your school?

PAPP: Yes, all three of us. And they called us greenhorns. And we weren't well-accepted.

LEVINE: Do you remember any incidents with the other children?

PAPP: Yes. They called us names, they pulled us by the hair, and we would be standing in, for games, you know, to play games. They didn't want to hold your hand. They put their hand in back of them. And the teacher would have to come and close the line, you know. And it was very, very difficult for us for

about three years. I was in the third grade and thank God we picked up the English language very, very quickly. In the third grade I was teaching the slow American children reading. So you see how fast we learned. WE had to take the child out in a certain hall, you know, in a hall where they, at that time, they learned that a student will learn faster from a classmate than a teacher. So I had a boy who I was teaching reading, mind you, in third grade, greenhorn.

So, but they found, we had a teacher by the name of Miss Howe, and she idolized us three children, and I'll never forget her. And she taught us how to pronounce the words. She kept us through her lunch hour and after school to teach us anything we didn't know, you know, to answer a question. And there's one particular thing that stands out that changed the children's attitude toward me. We had spelling lessons, and the teacher always taught us, "Learn your lesson a day ahead also." And I did. I used to take my book, and if I didn't know a word I'd go to my girlfriend's house and ask her what the word was." I says, "Yolanda," I says, "that word doesn't sound right." I says, "Bouquet." I said, "You said that word is 'bouquet.'" I said, "Where's, there's no K in

that, honey." I says, "Where's the K?" "But Margaret, that's what it is. B-O-U-Q-U-E-T." I'll never forget it. So this was in the third grade. So this particular day the teacher gave us our regular lessons. Now I'm going to give you another piece of paper, and see if you carry out my orders about learning or studying your lesson for tomorrow. I did.

So, and I always did. So my spelling lesson, while you're doing this, is I want to check these papers. Well, thank God my spelling lesson for that day was perfect. So she calls the attention to the class. She collected all the papers. Oh, each child had to change and mark the papers, and then she collected them.

LEVINE: So you'd be marking some other child's paper, and then she collected them.

PAPP: Yes. So she collected them. So she says, "I want the class' attention." So she says, I says, "Barbara Csati, please stand up." So I did. I says, "Oh, Lord." You know, you're always afraid when a teacher calls you, what did you do wrong. So she says to the class, "I want you to look at that little greenhorn that you all made so much fun of that you humiliate

all the time, you don't want to hold her hand." She said, "This little greenhorn has a perfect paper on tomorrow's lesson. The only one in the class has two perfect papers." And do you know, Ms. Levine, never again did those classmates ever call me names or humiliate me in any way. She's the one who did it. But it was not easy. It was one boy who was picking on my brother, an older boy in the class, but he was a troublesome kind of a boy. He said, one, the first Halloween we went to Prospect High School at the time, the first Halloween he almost killed him. I never had any use for Halloween after, you know, when I saw what almost happened to my brother.

LEVINE: What happened?

PAPP: He put a rock in a stocking and was swinging it, and he come out from the bushes and he was going to hit my brother in the head with it. Thank God my brother was able to recognize his voice, because he says, "I told you I would get you." And he ran in and told my uncle's, uh, son. So he, "Would you recognize his voice?" He says, "Yes, Uncle Frank, I would." So he went over to his, so my cousin went over to the boy's house and told them what had happened. And the

parents were furious. He says, "He not alone leaves him alone in school, he's only a little kid compared to him. Look at the size of your son." But he says, "He almost killed him." So that straightened that out.

LEVINE: He was dressed up in a costume, so you . . .

PAPP: No, he was not! He was in street clothes. But my, it was night time. It was dark. And my brother recognized his voice. So he almost killed him Halloween. So I got no use for Halloween.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Well, I think we should pause here while we change the tape, and then we'll continue.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is Tape Two. I've been speaking with Barbara Papp, who came from Hungary when she was eight, in 1921, and we're going to resume now. We were talking about your grade school in this country. You were in Trenton or Paterson?

PAPP: No, in Trenton, New Jersey.

LEVINE: Trenton, New Jersey. Now, tell me how the school in Trenton compared with the school you went to briefly when you were still in Hungary?

PAPP: You can't compare it, really, because the school building and the schoolhouse here is a mansion compared to where I went. It was only a one-room schoolhouse. And all the grades were in one, in one room. So, and you had one teacher teaching all the grades. But as I was told, when you finish in that one-room schoolhouse, you had your junior high education over here. That's how much you learned.

LEVINE: Was it more strict?

PAPP: Yes, very strict. And, over here, I mean, if the teacher punished you, you went home crying. Of course, if I went home crying, I guess I would have been punished again. (she laughs) I didn't dare go home crying. And we didn't dare do anything wrong. But over there the teachers smacked you with the whip if you did anything wrong.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other things that struck you as different when you first came to this country when you were a little girl, things that were new to you and

different for you?

PAPP: Oh, I was just amazed at the, at the method of teaching, you know, the beautiful school rooms, your blackboard. And things, the paper, pencils, pens that you had, inkwells, which we didn't have over there.

LEVINE: And how about outside of school? Were there things here that struck you as a child as unusual and new?

PAPP: Well, over in Europe once you were through with school you went straight home. (she laughs) And your chores were set out for you. Where over here, the children can go and, go to the library and do extra-curriculum after school. But over there there was nothing. I mean, everything is very, very different. And you had all these lovely books to take home. Over there you didn't have any books to take home.

LEVINE: How about the place where you lived? How did that compare with where you lived in Hungary?

PAPP: Where I came to America? Oh, we came to a beautiful new home that my uncle had built. A beautiful six-room house. Of course, there was no toilet, bathroom facilities in the house. You had to bathe in tubs.

But they had inside pump, because at that time there was only, I think, two houses on that street. My uncle's, and another house. So there was no sewer line. But he had had made, the bathroom was all set, and that's where my sister and I slept. They were able to put in a full-size bed in the bathroom, which was supposed to be the bathroom. And we did have a lovely home.

LEVINE: What was your uncle's name, the uncle whose house you went to?

PAPP: Uh, Csati Ferenc. Frank Csati.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was he like? Do you remember any experiences with him?

PAPP: Yes. He was a very, very kind man to us. He told his wife, who didn't want him to bring us here, "If I lose one leg, I'm going to walk until I get those children here. They're my brother's children." And this is what my aunt kept telling us. But, unfortunately, in 1929, my uncle died, and that was our downfall. His wife was very, very mean to us.

LEVINE: So you were a teenager when he died.

PAPP: Yes. I, well, I was, I was going on thirteen. I was twelve years old when he died. And he was a carpenter. He had very, very bad heart condition. It's what they call congestive heart failure. That's what he died of. And he couldn't work. Through his, through misfortune he lost his beautiful home. He exchanged it for a farm that wasn't worth anything. And he couldn't do the farm work. That's when he found out he had a heart problem. So they practically had to give the farm away for an old, semi-detached home. And he died, uh, I guess about a year after they sold the farm. So it didn't have, his life didn't have a happy ending. So now we three children were left up to his wife to raise.

LEVINE: Well, now, you were born in 1912, right?

PAPP: Yes.

LEVINE: So if he was, if he died in 1929, let's see, that would make you seventeen. Is there . . .

PAPP: No. He must have died sooner than that, then.

LEVINE: So he died before 1929.

PAPP: Yeah.

LEVINE: If he died when you were thirteen.

PAPP: Oh, yes. I was about thirteen.

LEVINE: You were about thirteen.

PAPP: Around thirteen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So that was now again the person who was the most responsible for you dying. So what, what happened?

PAPP: So now we lost our uncle. So here we are, my aunt, it's up to her to finish raising us three children. Well, she wasn't too nice about it, I'll tell you, Ms. Levine. And she resented us to begin with, and now it was up to her to finish the job my uncle started.

LEVINE: Did they have children of their own?

PAPP: Oh, yes. They had, when we came to America they had one married daughter. And one son, and one daughter lived at home, and another one lived with the family where he had his business. They had a trucking business. So he didn't stay at home. But it was up to her now to finish raising us. But I stood by her.

But my brother left home, and went to live with my aunt's oldest one. You got the story?

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

PAPP: And went to live with . . .

LEVINE: His cousin, really, right?

PAPP: Yeah. His first cousin.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PAPP: And my sister and I was home. And then for a while my sister lived with my aunt's youngest son, but I was still at home. And in spite of all her meanness, I tried to win her love.

LEVINE: How did you do that? Do you remember?

PAPP: I couldn't. No matter what, she would never put her arm around you to caress you in any way. But I did it to her, just the same, because I felt that here was my uncle, raised his children with his wife, and he brings three more children for her to raise, so now she is bitter. So I was able to feel sorry for her in a way. So no matter how she did it, but she did it. But when my sister was sixteen, she got the money

back, that thousand dollar bond. And that helped her along. But, you see, she was not educated.

LEVINE: Was she Hungarian as well?

PAPP: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Had been born in Hungary?

PAPP: Oh, yes. My uncle came here in 1909 and brought his family over right after I was born, the winter I was born. It must have been 1913 when he brought his family here. So they, you know, were all, nothing but Hungarian, you know, no other nationality in our family at all, you know. But there's Polish, Slavish and some of them are, you know, come from the border, so they speak a couple of, you know, the language. But ours is nothing but Hungarian.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, when you, you went through eighth grade, and you . . .

PAPP: I didn't finish eighth grade.

LEVINE: Oh.

PAPP: I had to leave school. Before my uncle died, I'll never forget it, because I used to bathe his legs,

were so, oh, they were so huge, you know, there was edematous. So he says to his wife, "I want to ask one favor from you." He says, "This child always wanted to be a nurse. See that she goes to school, and carry out her wish." So I remember when she said to him, she says, "How am I going to do it?" He says, "Your children will help you." Which I'm sure they would have, if she carried through. But she knew that we all had to go to school, Ms. Levine, till we're sixteen years old, by law. And she knew that when I'm sixteen, I could leave school and go to work, and that's what I had to do. I cried my heart out. The principal tried in every way to try to keep me, because, he says, "Your records, your school records, everything is so wonderful." He said, "WE hate to see you leave." But no, "I says, 'Miss Dunn, I have to go.'" I says, "My aunt said if I want shoes on my feet, I'm going to go to work."

LEVINE: So what did you do for work?

PAPP: Domestic work. I looked so young they thought I was, everywhere I went for a job they thought I was a kid. I couldn't get a job. And it was during the high Depression, 19, uh, what was it, '29, when we had the

beginning of the Depression years. It was awful. People were crying on the streetcorners. I couldn't get a job. Four dollars a week, I made, four dollars a week. First of all it was three-fifty. They gave me a fifty cent raise. But that was one less mouth they had to feed, they figured. So I didn't go. Like I said, I couldn't finish school, but that was in my mind all the time from the time I was twelve years old, that's all I wanted to do was nursing. So when my children were in school . . .

LEVINE: Well, first tell me how you met your husband.

PAPP: Oh, on a picnic. (she laughs) On a picnic in New Brunswick.

LEVINE: And what did, what happened?

PAPP: Oh, and he asked for my address, and then my number where I worked. You know, because . . .

LEVINE: You were working still? You were doing the domestic work?

PAPP: I was still doing, I was still doing domestic work. Yes, I did. And he came to see me.

LEVINE: What was your first impression of him?

PAPP: Well, he was kind of a nice fellow, you know. I saw, and I, it's a very, very difficult thing to even tell you. I wanted a life of my own. I never dated anybody. Everybody I met, my aunt would criticize. And I just wanted to make a home for myself. But it was the wrong time to do it, in 1935. Things were very bad. But we got married. We had a rough life. A year later my daughter was born. Fourteen months later my other daughter was born. Seven years later, I had a son, but he died. In 1949 I lost my husband. And here I am left with three children.

LEVINE: Tell me, your husband was also from Hungary.

PAPP: Yes, Timar, Timar.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

PAPP: T-I-M-A-R.

LEVINE: And that was nearby . . .

PAPP: Szabolcs. Timar Szabolcs. And his, they, his parents lived in Casey, New Jersey. So he came also, 19, I forget. I have his passport home. He came in 1922, I

think, to America. But he was in, he was back and forth across the ocean a couple of times. His grandfather raised him over there. And he came when he was seventeen. So he would have remembered much more. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: So what did he do for work during the Depression?

PAPP: Well, he worked in a pottery. He worked in a doll factory. Then he got a job in American Steel and Wire, and that's where he got hurt. And he had got a herniated disc, and the companies, at that time, were trying to throw you out rather than do anything for you. And he was out of work for quite a while. And I finally find, we took him to a doctor in Philadelphia and put him through test, and found out he had a herniated disc. Surgery was done at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, and he got cerebral hemorrhage of the brain following surgery, massive. The entire body was paralyzed. And he died the following morning. He was forty-four years old.

LEVINE: So what did you do then?

PAPP: Well, I was thirty-six. I never remarried. I made up my mind, the day he died, Ms. Levine, that I will

never marry. Because I found out, through my experience in life as a child, not everybody can love other people's children. And I wasn't going to bring in anybody in my home that's going to damage my children like I was damaged. And I never dated anybody, never got interested in anyone, I raised my children myself. I went and did domestic work by the day, five to six days a week, and took in laundry. Now, one night I went to the parent teacher's meeting, anything that went on in school where I can attend, I went, that they were going to have a nursing school in the Trenton High School. And I lived almost across the street from the high school, a beautiful high school. And I questioned it. And I found this is my only chance. But by this time I worked in St. Francis Hospital as nursing assistant. See, this was my only goal in life. This was all I wanted to do. So I went in and I was nursing assistant for, oh, about a year-and-a-half. So this daughter of mine was engaged to be married, and I, well, "Set your wedding date, honey." I said, "Whatever date it is, so that I can set my date, because I'm going to go back to school." So, and here I was forty-nine years old. I said, "I found out," I says, "we're going to have a nursing

school." And I says, "I'm going to take a chance at it." But you had to be a high school graduate, so here I was stuck again. So we had a nun who I worked with at St. Francis Hospital, and she says to me, her name was Sister Immaculata. She was a work horse. She would think nothing of picking up a chair and carrying it down the other end of the hall. "Don't help me. I can do this myself." She says to me one day, she says, "Mrs. Papp, before you go home I'd like to speak to you." I says, "All right, sister." So she says, "Sit down." She says, "You know, I've been watching you since I was assigned to this floor." I worked on the maternity floor. She says, "Can't you bring some employees in like yourself?" She says, "You are so dedicated to these patients." She says, "You know, you should be a nurse." I says, "Sister, that was my only goal in life." But I says, "I've got all kinds of things against me. Too many things against me." I said, "I don't have the education." And I says, "Now I find there's a nursing school opening in a high school." And I says, "I'm determined to try it." "You really want to do that?" I says, "Yes, I do, Sister. And I'm going to try it." I says, "They're giving all kinds of things to

the black people, why can't I have it?" I says, "I'm going to try it." She says, "Well, if you are going to do that, I am going to go down to either the hospital administrator and have a talk with her, and see that we back you up. If anybody should go into nursing, you should. You are born for that, Mrs. Papp." So anyway, she came back, and she says, "When you put your application in, let us know that you did it, so we could back you up if anything comes up. The hospital will back you up." So lo and behold, I went to put my application into the high school, and the first thing the principal of the vocational school says to me, "Are you sure you want to do this? You're never going to make it." I says, "Why do you tell me that I'm never going to make it." I says, "Can I try and have a chance?" She says, "Well, you didn't have the high school diploma." I says, "I know I don't." But I said, "I want to try. And if I don't make it," I said, "I'm going to try again." I said, "I've got to do this. This is the only chance I have." So he says, "All right." He says, "I can't hold you, stop you from making an application. But if you're rejected, I want you to know that it's because you don't have a high school education." But I knew this

is where the hospital is going to back me up. I didn't want to say anything to him. So, anyway, my application went through, and I was accepted in school. But, oh, my God, I says, "How am I ever going to make this? Trying to study at this age and absorb all of this into your head." I'd be up till one, two o'clock in the morning. I'd take all these notes and then tear it all apart and re-write them. So we had to go to school for three months for paperwork before we were divided up to go to our clinical experience in a hospital. So being I worked in St. Francis Hospital, for my clinical experience I had to go to Mercer Hospital. Well, that's all right. That's fine. So I said to my teacher, I said, "Ms. Birchnell," I says, "I know I'm having a rough time." I says, "I want your honest opinion. Because you had a talk with each one of the students before we were sent." I said, "Do you think I should repeat these three months again, because I do not want to fail this." She says, "No. Why should you?" She says, "You're keeping up with the class. It may be harder for you to do it." Because I was the oldest in the class. But she says, "Your marks are up to all of them. I'm disappointed in the younger . . ." There

was only thirteen of us in the class. "I'm disappointed in the younger ones because," she says, "they should be doing better, especially one of them just graduated from high school, she's doing very poorly." So the vice principal came in, and I overheard some of the conversation, because I heard my name mentioned, so she says, "How is," you know, "how is she doing?" Teacher says, "She's fine." She says, "She's keeping up with the class." So he says to her, he says, "Where do you draw a line," he says, "with these people?" He says, "She didn't have a high school education." She says, "She's doing fine." So, thank God, I passed my state boards. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Wonderful.

PAPP: So I went in, I went right back to St. Francis Hospital and I was with them seventeen years.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful.

PAPP: I retired from there.

LEVINE: Wow.

PAPP: But I loved it.

LEVINE: Tell me, tell me what you're proudest of, that you've done in your life.

PAPP: Raising my three children. And, uh, making my goal to be to go into the nursing field. That's what I wanted so badly. And I missed a lot, because I was a practical nurse, you know. At that age you couldn't, if you were thirty-five years old or older you couldn't go into the R.N. Today you can, but not then. But that was fine for me. And if I couldn't make my grade, if I couldn't pass my state boards, I would have been happy to go back and be a nursing assistant, just let me work with the patients.

LEVINE: What was it that you liked so much about working with patients?

PAPP: It's you're helping people. These people come into the hospital, they're sick, and it gives you such a great feeling to know that when they turned around and say to you, "Oh, you made me feel so much better when you washed my back!" Or you did anything to make them feel better, or, "You made me so comfortable!" Because I worked on a night shift for seventeen years. "You made me so comfortable I slept all night, Mrs.

Papp." They couldn't give you any amount of money to make you feel better than to know you gave them a comfortable night. I never enjoyed retirement. I retired in '77, but I never enjoyed it. I did volunteer work for eight years until I got sick, but I had cancer.

LEVINE: What kind of volunteer work did you do?

PAPP: In a hospital. And I went back to the same hospital and did volunteer work. But I was taken very sick in '88, and it's a miracle that I'm here. But I had lymphoma on the third portion of the duodenum. And I had chemotherapy. I had a pacemaker. And I had pneumonia three times in '88.

LEVINE: Well, you're not meant to die.

PAPP: No, I'm supposed to be here for some reason.

LEVINE: Well, what, if you thought of yourself, what do you, how do you think about yourself as far as being Hungarian and being American? Are certain parts of you Hungarian, or how do you think about it?

PAPP: Well, I am proud of my heritage. I guess we all are. But I am proud to be an American citizen. I never,

never want to give that up or lose it in any way. I'd defend this country no matter what I had to do. If I had to give my life for it, I would. I love my country. But I'm proud of my heritage, yes, I am. Who wouldn't be? You know, no matter what nationality you are. You're born to be that. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now what, what makes you happiest in this phase of your life?

PAPP: Well, I, anything my children do, you know, that's rewarding to them, is rewarding to me. I still have one more grandchild that I'd like to live long enough to see my little granddaughter, Jennifer, my son's little girl, to see what she's going to do. She wants to be a dentist. (she laughs) And I, I'd like to see her, and I'd like to see this daughter only have one child. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Why don't you tell me each of your children's names, just briefly?

PAPP: Barbara. She only has one child. His name is Gregory David, and he's going to be thirty years old in November. I'd like to see him get married. And I have a daughter, Marian, and she has two children, but

she had six grandchildren. (she laughs) They live in California. Her daughter is married to a doctor, so she has four children of her own and they're doing very well. Marian and her husband built a home there. He's a printer. And they opened a gift shop there in California. So they're doing very well.

LEVINE: Now, what was your son's name?

PAPP: My son's name is George.

LEVINE: George.

PAPP: Yeah. And he works for the Times newspaper company, The Trenton Times newspaper in Trenton, New Jersey. So they're all doing very well.

LEVINE: Okay. We just have one minute left. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close?

PAPP: Well, I want to thank you for bringing me here. This was real history in my life. It was really the beginning of a good life for me here in America, when I landed in this building. And I consider this a great privilege of being asked to come here.

LEVINE: I want to say it's been a great privilege for me to

talk with you. I really found your story very, very interesting. I want to thank you very much. I've been speaking with Barbara Papp, who came from Hungary at the age of eight in 1921, and today she is eighty years old, and, I mean, this isn't her birthday, but she is now eighty years old, and this is July 17, 1993, and this is Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service.