

EI-352
ELFRIEDE BLUM REIZMAN
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ROMANIA, 1929
AGE 14

SHIP: "THE PRESIDENT HARDING"
PORT: Cherbourg
RESIDENCES:
? GERMANY: BERLIN
? ROMANIA: TARGUMURES
? US: NEW YORK, NY; CLIFTON, NJ

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today at the home of Elfriede Reizman in Clifton, New Jersey. Mrs. Reizman came from Romania when she was fourteen years old in November 1929. Well, I'm very happy to be here, finally.

LEVINE: Thank you.

REIZMAN: And I look forward to hearing your story, which I'm sure will be more dramatic than you think. (both laugh) Why don't we start at the beginning? Give me your birth date. What is your birth date?

REIZMAN: My birth date, 1915, February 13.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

REIZMAN: In Berlin, Germany.

LEVINE: And how long did you live there?

REIZMAN: Uh, about four-and-a-half years. In 1919 my parents went to Romania because my father came from there. And conditions were very bad in big cities in Germany after World War One, so my father decided to go back to Romania where it was a agrarian area, and there would be food, at least.

LEVINE: Is that where you father had been from originally?

REIZMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about Berlin?

REIZMAN: Little flashes here and there.

LEVINE: Anything that you . . .

REIZMAN: Well, I remember the house we lived in.

LEVINE: What was that like?

REIZMAN: Well, it was a high-rise. We lived on the second floor. We had a balcony, and I remember looking over the balcony, and I remember my grandmother spanking me for getting on a chair and looking over the balcony. Well let--. I remember going -- being taken to the zoo and being given cocoa, and wishing that I was grown-up so I didn't have to drink cocoa. I must have been tired of it.

LEVINE: Was your grandmother, did your grandmother stay in Berlin?

REIZMAN: Yeah, we lived together with my grandparents.

LEVINE: What was your grandparents, what were their names?

REIZMAN: Hansman.

LEVINE: This was your mother's mother and father?

REIZMAN: My mother's parents.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about them?

REIZMAN: Well, let me see. My grandma was a rather strict person. My mother went to work, so she raised me and my little brother for a few years. I know I had to eat all the food she put in front of me. Uh, and well, she was, she was nice, but rather strict.

LEVINE: Did she tell you stories or songs?

REIZMAN: I don't remember her telling me stories. No, I really don't remember her telling me stories. I had a younger brother, just two years younger. I remember playing with him.

LEVINE: Do you remember any toys you had?

REIZMAN: Toys? Yes, I do remember a beautiful little grocery store that I had with a counter. And in those days they didn't have packaged things, but it had, (what is it called?) drawers, you know, on the side. And it had white label on it, and it was a porcelain label, and it said sugar and flour and coffee.

LEVINE: Was it big, or was it a dollhouse size?

REIZMAN: A dollhouse size, yeah. It seemed big to me, you know, when you four years old everything is big, but I imagine it was about this size.

LEVINE: About a yard long.

REIZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was your brother's name?

REIZMAN: Alfred. But he died when he was two years old, of pneumonia.

LEVINE: Was that a common occurrence at that time?

REIZMAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

REIZMAN: No.

LEVINE: And so was your mother from Berlin originally?

REIZMAN: She was raised there, but she was born in Hungary. Her parents came from Hungary. But my grandfather was adventurous, and he thought Germany, especially Berlin, was a lovely place to, to advance yourself, to live there, culturally and commercially and in every way.

LEVINE: What did your grandfather do?

REIZMAN: He was a master tailor.

LEVINE: So did he make clothing for the family, too?

REIZMAN: I don't remember. I imagine he did, but he had a, I have a picture of him somewhere with his shop. He had eight men working for him. So it was a good shop.

LEVINE: And how about your father? What was he doing?

REIZMAN: My father had worked for him. That's how he met my mother.

LEVINE: Okay. And, so then, do you remember going to Romania?

REIZMAN: Yes, of course.

LEVINE: What was that like for you?

REIZMAN: Uh, oh, I loved it. I went to a convent school. That was the only girls' school, and it was a prestigious school. And I was a tomboy, and my mother decided that the all-girls school would be best for me, to make a lady out of me.

LEVINE: Were you the only child, then, when your brother died?

REIZMAN: Then I had another brother who was five years younger than I.

LEVINE: And he was born in Romania?

REIZMAN: He was born in Romania.

LEVINE: And his name?

REIZMAN: Alexander.

LEVINE: Now, what was the town in Romania?

REIZMAN: What was the town?

LEVINE: Where you lived.

REIZMAN: I don't know what you mean. That - what, what? It was a beautiful town, as I remember it.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of it?

REIZMAN: Yes. Romanian name or Hungarian name? Romanian, it's Romania now, so I give the Romanian. Targumures.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

REIZMAN: T-A-R-G-U-M-U-R-E-S.

LEVINE: So it was Hungarian.

REIZMAN: Before World War One.

LEVINE: I see.

REIZMAN: By the time we moved there, it was just in transition. The Romanians have taken over. It was a beautiful town. It was really beautiful town.

LEVINE: It was an agrarian economy.

REIZMAN: Well, the surrounding area. There were lots of farms. But the town itself was a sophisticated town, actually. Lots of stores, theater, museum, movies, beautiful stores. It was an elegant, pre-- lots of parks. It was a lovely town.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in there?

REIZMAN: Uh, yes. I lived with my aunt on and off. I liked moving back and forth. I didn't have sitz fleisch [patience, lit. sitting-flesh]. The house, where we lived, I remember two places. When I -- when we first moved there it was a side street, but nice, comfortable brick or stucco houses. And then later we lived in another place where we had, there was a corner house, and we had a park in front of it. It was a stucco house, two-story. Upstairs was a photographer's studio, and downstairs was another apartment.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was your aunt, your mother's sister?

REIZMAN: I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: Your aunt that you, who you stayed with. Was that your father's sister?

REIZMAN: No, my father's - my father's sister. My mother's family stayed in Hun-- went to Hungary. They didn't come to Romania.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

REIZMAN: Emanuel.

LEVINE: Emanuel. And your mother's name?

REIZMAN: Louise.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

REIZMAN: Huntsman, I mentioned.

LEVINE: And your aunt's name?

REIZMAN: Uh, Wolf.

LEVINE: Wolf.

REIZMAN: Wolf. Josephine Wolf.

LEVINE: Okay. So that was your maiden name, Wolf.

REIZMAN: Her maiden name, my aunt's maiden name. No, not my aunt's maiden, my aunts married name was Wolf.

LEVINE: Oh, oh, I see. Uh-huh. And your maiden name?

REIZMAN: B-L-U-M. Blum.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your father when you were a little girl in Romania?

REIZMAN: He was a rather distant man. He didn't know how to associate with children. He really didn't have the knack for it. And then, when we went to Romania when I was four-and-a-half, we were, actually I don't remember, but I'm told, I was told, there was a Revolution in 19, 1918, 1919, in Hungary. So we were stuck there for several months. I don't remember just how long. And then we went to Romania.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So when you were en route . . .

REIZMAN: We were en route, yeah.

LEVINE: In Hungary. Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about those months in Hungary?

REIZMAN: Flashes. Not really anything concrete. I remember relatives we lived with -- had a nice garden with a fruit tree of some sort, but nothing really concrete.

LEVINE: And how about your aunt? What was she like?

REIZMAN: My aunt, uh, well, she was a good woman but a bitter woman. Her husband left her with a small child, came to America. My aunt, she had a chance to follow in a year or so, but her mother, my grandmother, was still living, and she had no sister, only brothers, and she didn't want to leave her mother with daughter-in-law and brothers, so she stayed on and on and on, and she lived on for quite a few years. In the meantime, her husband got tired of waiting for her, divorced her, and remarried. He lived in Chicago. So she was left with a two-year-old child at the time, and somehow it made her bitter for life.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things you ever did with her, like activities, things that you would do, maybe when you stayed with her?

REIZMAN: You know something? In those days, grown-ups didn't pay as much attention to children. She'd give me dominoes to play with, or playing cards, or things like that, but they didn't actually spend time to play with you or tell you. Later on she told me things about the family when I was older, but not as a youngster.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? How were you in relation to her?

REIZMAN: My mother was a very sophisticated woman. She was a couturier. And she was not home, she ran a business, and we were brought up by servants. And I resented it. (she laughs)

LEVINE: How about your father? Was he a tailor also when he came?

REIZMAN: Yes, yes. But he came to America when I was about seven, and I didn't see him again until I was, until I came to America, you know, almost fifteen.

LEVINE: But, so your mother was cultured. She took advantage of the theater and . . .

REIZMAN: Oh, yes, definitely, definitely.

LEVINE: Did you have best friends?

REIZMAN: Yes, you know, in school you have friends as you grow up, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was it like being in a convent school?

REIZMAN: I liked it, I liked it, yes. They were strict, but kind. And it was prestigious, you know. You wore your uniform, you walked down the street, you felt like a big shot.

LEVINE: And was the town a mix of Jewish families and non-Jewish?

REIZMAN: Mixed, very mixed.

LEVINE: And how was, how were the relations in that town?

REIZMAN: Well, as far as I remember, it was fine. Most of the merchants, the high-class merchants, I remember the name, like, you know, Schwartz and Weiss and Roth, they were all Jewish. Most of the merchants were. A lot of the doctors were Jewish. Professional people, a lot of them were Jewish.

LEVINE: So, let's see. So you finished what they called grade school in Romania?

REIZMAN: Right, right.

LEVINE: And did you have aspirations for yourself as a young girl, what you wanted to do?

REIZMAN: (she pauses) Not too much. I knew, you see, I didn't feel that we were a family, because my father was away and my mother was in business. I knew I wanted to have a family, but I want to be the mother and be home and raise my children. I think this was my greatest aspiration really, motherhood.

LEVINE: Were you close to your younger brother?

REIZMAN: We were five years apart. I loved him. But, you know, five years, when you're little, is a lot.

LEVINE: And did you have other family in that town?

REIZMAN: Uh, yes, but I was only close to this one aunt and her daughter, who was, oh, she was about seven years older than I. So, again, you know, at that age, seven years is a lot. So we weren't friendly, actually.

LEVINE: Was your family religious?

REIZMAN: No.

LEVINE: And how about food?

REIZMAN: Food?

LEVINE: Do you remember particular dishes that . . .

REIZMAN: Oh, yes. Hungarian fare is very good. I still make some of it.

LEVINE: Really? What do you, what is it that you carried on?

REIZMAN: Oh, well. (she laughs) Noodles with cottage cheese and sour cream, or. Now I don't use sour cream, just yogurt. And cold fruit, borscht that I used to like, and things like that.

LEVINE: Well, so your father went ahead first.

REIZMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And then did he, was he a tailor here in the United States?

REIZMAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And then did he correspond and send money?

REIZMAN: He became very lackadaisi-- about corresponding, about sending money. He wasn't a very, uh, he wasn't terribly family-conscious.

LEVINE: So . . .

REIZMAN: The trouble with him was that he was a gambler, you see. So all his attention and his money went for that, and that was very, very bitter on us when we came out. And my mother left him about two years after we came out because she found there's no sense. She was working, and he was gambling. So.

LEVINE: Was that something he did in Europe as well? Uh-huh.

REIZMAN: That's why my mother insisted that he come to America. She felt if he's broken with his old cronies there, that he will pick up a new life. But he found the same crowd here in America. When you're a gambler, no matter where you are, you find partners.

LEVINE: So why was it decided that you and your mother and brother would come when you did?

REIZMAN: Why? Well, because I think financially it was becoming a little harder in - in Romania. And my mother felt, after all, she has a husband, my children have a father, he should take some responsibility. He wasn't while we were there, but she felt if we come here, we will. It didn't work out.

LEVINE: So do you remember leaving?

REIZMAN: Yes, I remember leaving, yes.

LEVINE: What did your mother or you personally take with you? Do you remember?

REIZMAN: Uh, just some clothing. Nothing much else. We didn't bring any furniture or things like that.

LEVINE: And so you left the town where you were living, and you traveled . . .

REIZMAN: My aunt came with us. My aunt came with us. And I understand the reason, this is what I was told at the time, excuse me, that my aunt developed a cough on the way. She may have had it before, I don't know. And because of that cough, we had to go to Ellis Island for several hours. She had to be examined and cleared.

LEVINE: Wait. I'm going to pause for a second here. You had dreams of doing artwork when you were a young girl.

REIZMAN: Yeah. But then somehow it didn't work out. But I do now. All the sculpture you see here is mine, that.

LEVINE: Beautiful. You do it now, at this point?

REIZMAN: Yeah. When this gets better, I will do it again, yeah. I've been doing it, let's see, I started again, I started to study, actually, when I was fifty, fifty-something, I went to school. And . . .

LEVINE: Well, let's lead up to that.

REIZMAN: Okay.

LEVINE: We'll talk about, let's see. You left with your aunt, and did your cousin come, too?

REIZMAN: No, no. My aunt just came as a visitor.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. So it was your mother, your aunt, your brother and you. (disturbance to the microphone)

REIZMAN: As a matter of fact, my mother didn't come with us. She didn't come for another year.

LEVINE: Oh. When you got here, well, let's, uh, so you left Romania, and then how did you travel, and where did you go to catch the ship?

REIZMAN: We traveled by train to Cherbourg, and there we took the boat.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of it?

REIZMAN: The name of the boat? President Harding.

LEVINE: And were you examined before you . . .

REIZMAN: I'm sure. I'm sure I was.

LEVINE: Yeah. And what were the accommodations like on the ship?

REIZMAN: On the ship? It was all right. I was very unhappy, and I was seasick, so nothing really pleased me.

LEVINE: What were your feelings about coming here?

REIZMAN: Uh, coming here? Not very good.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought about it?

REIZMAN: I just feel sad, I just feel sad, because I felt comfortable where I was, and I was coming to the unknown. Besides, my mother wasn't coming then, and I didn't know just when she will be coming, so it was not a happy voyage for me at all.

LEVINE: So were you in the, did you have a cabin on the ship, or were you and your aunt and your brother in the hold, in the steerage?

REIZMAN: A cabin. It was, I think it was called a tourist, tourist cabin. It was small. Just bunk bed, and I don't know what else was in there.

LEVINE: Did you go to a dining room when you felt well enough?

REIZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And was there anything that happened during the voyage that . . .

REIZMAN: Not really, except I heard that there was, what is it called, it wasn't an earthquake, but there was some serious disturbance on the bottom of the ocean which made our ship go like that, and when I did get up the dining room, two fellows had to drag me. (she laughs) I couldn't make it.

LEVINE: So were you, you were fourteen, so you, I mean, were you interested in boys at that period? I mean, did you leave friends that you felt bad about leaving?

REIZMAN: At fourteen I wasn't any more interested in boys than probably any other girl. I don't remember any special interest. Then I made some friends, but it took quite some time. I felt very inadequate not being able to speak the language, and some of the teachers weren't especially kind. I remember one espec-- some just kind of ignored me. Some made me feel stupid because I didn't understand. Others expected me to carry on the same as the others, but I couldn't. So that was not a happy year either.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about arriving in the New York Harbor. Do you remember that?

REIZMAN: Yes.

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

REIZMAN: Yeah. I knew the Statue of Liberty, but I wasn't thrilled. (both laugh)

LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island? What was your impression of that?

REIZMAN: Horrible, horrible. I felt as if we were going through prison. I didn't feel like a human being. You stand in line, your throat is looked at, your eyes are looked at. You are not talked to like a human being, but you pushed or you pointed, you know. It was not a pleasant experience.

LEVINE: So were you and your brother and your aunt afraid that she might be sent back?

REIZMAN: Uh, I don't know if I had that thought. I didn't --. I think, being at that age I was, you know, most kids that age are selfish. I don't think I worried about her. My own misery overtook me.

LEVINE: But you would have been let off the ship in Manhattan had it not been for your aunt having the cough?

REIZMAN: I don't know. I really don't know. I came with her, and we were kept. But only, I think, a few hours, or a half a day. We didn't sleep over at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did you eat there, do you remember?

REIZMAN: Yes, and it was, we were served one meal. The walls were dark green like the leaves there, and the place was huge. Very cold, very unfriendly. It gave me the chills. And long tables, and you sat there, and you were given the food, you know, (laughs) like in a prison or something.

LEVINE: And I guess you hadn't seen so many different kinds of people.

REIZMAN: Well, I don't think that really bothered me. That didn't bother me. I - I always like different people. Not that I was exposed to so many different kinds of people, but people's differences never bothered me.

LEVINE: So then did your father come to Ellis Island?

REIZMAN: Yeah. I don't know whether, no, I don't think he had to come there. We were -- from Ellis Island we were put on a small ship, and then we were brought ashore.

LEVINE: And do you remember the reunion with your father?

REIZMAN: I was happy at first because even though (she laughs) --. I didn't feel love for him, I felt that -- a father, you see, which I didn't have. I didn't have a father before, so it was nice to know that I do have a father. That was the feeling. Not any special love for him as a person.

LEVINE: And how did he act? Do you remember when you first saw him?

REIZMAN: Well, he - he seemed glad to see us but, as I said, he -- he just, you know, he didn't know how to, he didn't know how to show it, how to act upon it.

LEVINE: And where did you go, then?

REIZMAN: Well, he -- he had a nice apartment in the Bronx. He was living with a woman at the time who had a child. She was nice, and the little girl was about the age of my brother, and then after a while, very - very shortly she packed up and left.

LEVINE: So was your aunt living with you?

REIZMAN: Yes, with us.

LEVINE: In the Bronx.

REIZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So then did you, did you go to school here?

REIZMAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Was it high school?

REIZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was that like? You started to say.

REIZMAN: Well, it was hard, it was hard. I really had to struggle with a dictionary next to me (she laughs) looking up every word of a sentence, you know. By the time I got some meaning out of one sentence, a half hour would be gone. So it was a long struggle at first.

LEVINE: Were there other children your age in your classes that were coming from Europe as well?

REIZMAN: I met, yes, I met one girl, but she had been here a year ahead of me, also from Hun-- Hungary. She came from Hungary, and we became very good friends. She was a lovely girl. Her name is Gabriella. But she got married and moved to the south somewhere, so we lost touch.

LEVINE: So then you stayed with your father and aunt and brother until your mother came, and you were still in the Bronx, and your mother came to that place.

REIZMAN: Right. My - my aunt got a job after a while as a housekeeper and had - had her visiting visa extended, and she worked in a - in a very fine family on the West Side for a year. She wanted to have a little money to take back with her.

LEVINE: So she didn't go back until after your mother had come over.

REIZMAN: About a year after.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING

OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: And what about your social life? I mean, as you were getting fifteen, sixteen?

REIZMAN: I met Hungarians, mostly. My father belonged to some Hungarian clubs in the Bronx, and there was one in Yorkville. And there I met people. Young, old, all kinds. Nice, not so nice.

LEVINE: Did your feeling change at any point that you can --

REIZMAN: Well, I got acclimated after a while.

LEVINE: And then, in high school, did you, did you finish high school?

REIZMAN: Yes. (an airplane can be heard on the tape) Half of the last year. I got ill. I had to have surgery. And somehow I just didn't feel like going back.

LEVINE: And then did you work after that?

REIZMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: What did you do?

REIZMAN: What did I do? Well, I didn't feel I was trained for any kind of office work because my English was still not that good. And I really wasn't trained for very much. And I did want to get away from home and be independent. So I took a job with a family. The woman was a doctor, a physician, the husband was an engineer, and they had a two-year-old child. And I worked with them and lived with them for three years until I got married. And I liked that very much because the child was like my own child, and they lived on Central Park West. I could go out with him, be in the park all day, so I liked that job.

LEVINE: And meanwhile, what did your mother do here?

REIZMAN: She worked. She had different jobs. Well, she worked as an alteration hand on Fifth Avenue, 57th Street and that area. And they didn't pay very much in those days. This was in the '30s. [aside] Let me put - I can't put it on - I'm very warm Let me open the door. Maybe we'll . . .

LEVINE: We'll pause here for . . . (break in tape) Okay. We're resuming now.

REIZMAN: I had an uncle, my husband (my husband!) -- my father's older brother and his wife, they were childless, and we used to see them. They were all right. Nothing extraordinary. They lived in Yorkville.

LEVINE: Did you take advantage of the cultural aspects of being in New York?

REIZMAN: I was fifteen and I discovered all the museums. Every Sunday I would take the subway from the Bronx and get off at different stations and study the neighborhood. So in no time at all I knew The Brooklyn Museum and Prospect Park and Central Park and Crotona Park and all the parks.

LEVINE: And how about your brother? How did he fare in the city?

REIZMAN: He assimilated sooner than I did because he was only nine, and all he had to do was go out in the street and find a pal to play ball with. Even if they didn't know how to speak to one another. He became more Americanized than I.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband?

REIZMAN: How did I? Uh, in the - in the Hungarian club.

LEVINE: This was when you were working on Central Park.

REIZMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And was that club around that area?

REIZMAN: No, no, no. One was in the Bronx, and one was on Seventy-some street in Yorkville. And I knew his sister. You know, you go to a club, you meet people, you don't always really remember how, you just sort of get to know.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

REIZMAN: Marcel.

LEVINE: And did you see him for quite a while before you came to America?

REIZMAN: Yeah, yeah. He was thirteen years older, and he took his time. (she laughs) He was giving me a chance to grow up. I was only nineteen when I met him. And, yeah, we went out for a couple of years before I decided for him that we should get married already.
(they laugh)

LEVINE: Do you remember places you would go, or what you would do for dates, or enjoyment?

REIZMAN: With him?

LEVINE: Yeah.

REIZMAN: With him? Well, he had a car. I think that's what attracted me to him at first. (she laughs) Because in those days to have a car,

my God, that was a big deal. Oh, yeah, he would go up Westchester county or go out to the beach.

LEVINE: So it, really, it was the idea of driving someplace.

REIZMAN: Yeah, it was - it was nice.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

REIZMAN: Four.

LEVINE: And their names?

REIZMAN: Victor, Loretta, Vivian and Peter.

LEVINE: And where did you live once you were married?

REIZMAN: Well, at first, let me see. Now, the first two years we lived in the Bronx with my in-laws.

LEVINE: Had your husband come from Europe as well?

REIZMAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: From what country?

REIZMAN: Hungary. He came when he was eighteen. And then later his sister came. She married. And then we lived together in the Bronx. It was less expensive that way. Also, there was anti-Semitism in the way, and they wanted the parents to come. And we rented a big house, and we all moved in there. And I lived, we lived there together for two years.

LEVINE: And was that the first time you had experienced any anti-Semitism?

REIZMAN: Well, I didn't have any experience of anti-Semitism. I was here already. When I was in Europe, I'm sure it existed, but I had no experience of it.

LEVINE: And did you experience anything here, you yourself?

REIZMAN: Living in the Bronx (she laughs) everybody was Jewish there.

LEVINE: So then you, and what did your husband do?

REIZMAN: He was a mechanical engineer.

LEVINE: So he had been educated . . .

REIZMAN: Here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Then you moved on your own?

REIZMAN: Yes, then - then we separated from the family, and he bought a house in Long Beach. And we lived there (she laughs) forty years.

LEVINE: So you got what you wanted in effect.

REIZMAN: Pretty much.

LEVINE: A family. Uh-huh. And did you then work when you were raising your children, or you were strictly at home? Uh-huh. Now tell me about this phase.

REIZMAN: Work, of course I worked, from morning to night.
(they laugh)

LEVINE: Right.

REIZMAN: I didn't earn any money, but I work. Believe me, when you raise four children, run a house, you work.

LEVINE: Tell me about, then, this phase of your life, how, what you've done.

REIZMAN: Since when?

LEVINE: Since your children are grown.

REIZMAN: Well, my children grew up, and I didn't have much to do. I didn't feel like just sitting and playing cards and having tea parties, so I decided to go and study art. So that's what --

LEVINE: Where did you . . .

REIZMAN: Well, I went to different places. I went to the National Academy in New York, and I studied private, at Hoffstra I went for a year, the Brooklyn Museum Art School I went for a year.

LEVINE: And you settled on making sculpture?

REIZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, and you, how active have you been in that, in doing that?

REIZMAN: I've been pretty active, yes. I sold, I had shows.

LEVINE: And what effect do you think it had on your life to have started out in Europe and in Romania and then . . .

REIZMAN: I'll tell you what. (she sighs) We had a different upbringing than the American children. The schools were strict, ethical, and you learned to respect your elders, you learned ethics -- you didn't get away with anything. Here, I'm afraid, it's lax. Unless at home you hold the rein over your children, they're very easily, go astray. So you, I -- I had to be firm, not over-strict. I was never over-strict, but firm. My - my children grew up to know right from wrong. They

listened. They were respectful. They still are. And I think that's the difference between growing up in Europe, even if it was just ten years from five to fifteen, or four to fourteen, those are impressionable years. What you learn in those years remains with you.

LEVINE: Can you think of, besides the, being firm with your children, are there other customs or ways that you think you carried . . .

REIZMAN: I don't, no. They're pretty much American. They're pretty much American. I don't think they, I don't think they have any European notions about anything. They said, you know, they're respectful with people. They honest, good people, hardworking. I always emphasized, you know, hard work, and the, not just advantage, but the moral aspect of hard work.

LEVINE: How about you personally? Do you have customs, ways about you that . . .

REIZMAN: I don't know. I can't tell on myself. Others may notice it, but I don't. To me it's natural what I'm doing.

LEVINE: Let's see. How about changes that you've noticed in your life. I mean, are there any things that were different that you either miss, or changes you've seen that have made . . .

REIZMAN: Well, you change as you grow up, you know. Whether it's here or there, you mature and you're not exactly the same person, even though fundamentally you are, but as you grow up, you grow up.

LEVINE: Do you, are you enjoying this phase of your life?

REIZMAN: Yes, yes. I made very nice friends here. And if I were healthy, I would just kick my heels together. I find it sometimes a little confining. I don't have a car, so I can't run around as I'd like to. My daughter works. When she has time, she takes me places, but I'm not completely free. But neither is anyone else. You just have to make the best of it.

LEVINE: Is there anything that you would like to say or maybe, what is it you're most proud of?

REIZMAN: What I'm most proud of? Having good children. That's what I'm most proud of.

LEVINE: And is there anything else that you would like to say about coming here?

REIZMAN: About coming to America?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

REIZMAN: Naturally, (she laughs) since World War Two, we're all happy to be here and not there. At the time I came, I didn't know, but now I do.

LEVINE: And do you have grandchildren also?

REIZMAN: Pardon?

LEVINE: Do you have grandchildren?

REIZMAN: Ten.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, I guess that's it for my questions, unless there's anything you'd like to say before we close.

REIZMAN: I don't know what else to say, except I have a zest for life, and I have the capacity of enjoying little things, even. It doesn't have to be anything grand. And these things give pleasure in my life.

LEVINE: And your artwork is beautiful.

REIZMAN: Pardon?

LEVINE: Your artwork is so beautiful, it must give you satisfaction.

REIZMAN: Yes, yes. See my Don Quixote there?

LEVINE: Oh! It's wonderful.

REIZMAN: That's a nice piece. And so is the one next to it. That's Circe. Do you know who Circe is? Uh, an enchantress, a sea enchantress who lures sailors onto her island in the Aegean Sea, and then turns them into pigs. One is already metamorphosed to pig, the other one is in the process. I like that piece.

LEVINE: Yeah, I do, too. Okay. Well, this might be a good point to end. I want to thank you very much.

REIZMAN: Thank you.

LEVINE: It's very interesting to talk with you. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been speaking . . .

REIZMAN: Can you give me a card?

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I've been speaking with Elfriede Reitzman . . .

REIZMAN: The National Park Service?

LEVINE: The National Park Service maintains Ellis Island.

REIZMAN: I see.

LEVINE: So that's where I work. And we're here in Clifton, New Jersey, and it's July 20, 1993, and I'm signing off.

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